

MY VAGABONDAGE

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H. R. Alston

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MY VAGABONDAGE



My Vagabondage

Being the Intimate Autobiography of
A NATURE'S NOMAD

By

J. E. Patterson

Author of

"Tillers of the Soil," "Fishers of the Sea," etc.

"Fool," said my Muse to me, "look in thy heart and write."

SIDNEY.



London

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“Whither, thou turbid wave ?

. I am a wave of life,
Stained with my margin's dust ;
From the struggle and the strife
Of the narrow stream I fly
To the sea's immensity.”

LONGFELLOW.

“I am an ill orator ; and, in truth, used to indite more
honestly than eloquently.”

JOHN MARSTON.

TO
HER, WHO HAS SPENT
TEN YEARS IN LOYALLY
STANDING BY AND ENCOURAGING
A SEEMING FAILURE, I INSCRIBE THIS UNCON-
VENTIONAL RECORD OF SOME
FORTY YEARS OF AN
UNQUIET LIFE.

TO HER : MY WIFE

*Pray Heaven guard thee till life's out ;
Or give thy fate into my hands,
That I may bind it round about
With Love's own service—jewelled bands.*

*So long I sought, and sometimes found
A glimmering of th' ideal one :
Now bursts on me—earth-stained and bound—
The splendid beauty of thy sun !*

*In lonely strife I bitter grew,
Then wrote of love as of false stars ;
Pretending felt what others knew,
I fancied love's most baneful scars.*

*Now do I feel his glorious heat,
Nor dread one whit 'twill turn to pain ;
I wrote him wrong ere knew him sweet,
Thus richer find my growing gain.*

*Charge high—I bid thee ; charge, I pay
For all thy boundless wealth of heart ;
Here at thy feet I humbly lay
All good that is of me a part.*

*Before thee low, O treasured soul !
I kneel in reverence nigh divine ;
Scarce knowing that so fair a whole
Ideal is now truly mine.*

*Unsung's each song I sang, here thrice
To sing afresh for thy sweet sake.
Love's only proof is sacrifice,
And all my offerings pray thee take.*

J. E. P.

Helborn. December 7, 1900

PREFACE

The literary bagman—An apology and a claim—The reason of all this
—Some items foreshadowed—The surgeon's scalpel on himself—
Robin's "Take courage"—Irrelevant matters—My forebears.

"OH, pedlar, what have you to sell?" So, if the mood of inquiry or some necessity be upon us, we ask, when accosted by the itinerant salesman on the wayside. And in a similar manner, but with another meaning, the inquiring reader asks of every literary bagman whom he meets. Thus: "Oh, writer, what have you to tell?" In this case little, indeed, beyond the plainly rendered ups and downs of a varied life; some of which may amuse, nothing of which is intended to teach directly, yet all of which it will be my humble endeavour to make interesting, and may, in the end, be found to possess some bearing on the gospel of persistent endeavour. In truth, it is but a sort of vaudeville rather than a serious drama to which you, reader, are asked to be a spectator by the means of the mind's eye. Or shall we say a comedy with life's inevitable touch of tragedy towards the end of the piece. As to errors of omission and commission, both of which will be found herein—as they are everywhere and ever will be when faulty humanity is the originating point—I can but ask for the reader's indulgence; assuring him that while I claim the right to complain in certain cases, it is far from my desire to be looked on either as a man with a grievance, or as one who has become embittered by a long and barefooted

tramp on a hard road, thorn and flint-strewn by the petty, senseless jealousies and conventions which are to-day what they have been since writing was first considered to be an art and *literature* as a part of the highest mental culture. Nor would I have it thought that my own limitations, wilful and temperamental delinquencies are ever forgotten in the mentioning or the criticizing of the shortcomings of others.

As to the wherefore of all this telling by one who is, so to write, somewhat new to the road and still has so much of his journey to make—that is due to a surrendering to the opinions of friends, literary and otherwise. They think that what can be said should be put down here and now, especially as the most of it cannot be recorded by any other person except at the cost of unrequitable time and labour, and even not then in some instances. For where are they who shared with me in those bits of happen-along, sort of harmless devilry abroad? Some I know to be lying at the bottom of “the Bay.” Others?— Although this broken record may come under the eyes of most of them, where are they? Ask the ever-shifting winds, the changing currents and shoals of circumstance—ask the never-quiet maelstrom of humanity to heave back the thousands of indistinguishable specks which its insatiable whirl is drawing to oblivion day-by-day. It were almost as well to try to recall the words said at table last night to the man who died before this morning broke. And about the earlier doings: Who shall say whether that graveyard tress was dark-brown or raven-black? Who can tell which broken tomb-stone formed my cramped-up reading-room, or show that those imaginary scalp-hunts, on

bare-backed ponies at midnight, were not the wild doings of temporary reality, which I claim they were? Will any one deny that the human skull which was thrown at poor "Taffy" Jones's head did not break into fragments when it hit him?—and that the grey thing I met, in the dead o' night, at the church-yard gate, was not enough to scare the average boy of ten years into dumb jelly or shrieking activity? At any rate, such is the position at present, and this is its defence—to which both judge and jury are invited to give a careful consideration; particularly as there is no charm of narrative, no borrowing of interest by the raking-in of dead celebrities, and no magnetism of real personality with which to win an acquittal on the charge of unwarranted public appearance.

I have said that this is to be a sort of comedy of action rather than of manners, more a play of the direct type than of the reflective. Moreover, the end is to be a happy one, so far as destiny has now written it down—not that all tragedies end in horror, funeral notes and the trappings of woe. At the same time, behind such a venture there is a bristling *cheval de frise* of seriousness that pulls one up with the query: How will you surmount or evade me? This appearing in dishabille before a crowd, to which one must always have a dislike; this putting one's self down in cold print, for all the world to pry into, snigger at or admire, loftily look down on or pity and sympathise with—it is no light task. For surely that is what a real autobiography should be—not a mere tabulation of passing incidents, important or trivial; but some laying bare of the inner-ego, some insight to the true psychology of the writer; in fact, the

surgeon's turning of his own scalpel vivisectingly upon himself. Therefore it is not lightly to be entered upon, except by those thick-skinned persons who have no respect either for the world or themselves. And my claim is that of Terence's, I am an alien to nothing that is human. Yet the very heterogeneousness of human nature gives me pause, asking : Dare you use your dissecting knife upon yourself, then let the light-o'-heart, the empty-headed, the ignorant scoffer, side-by-side with the kindly-hearted and those who understand, look into the wounds?—follow the partings of the knife and find some vain amusement there? For the scalpel itself I care nothing ; but the other——. Here, just without my window, comes that trusting bird of English winters, making the sharp-aired, brief sunshine ring with his autumnal song, than which there are some of higher flights and more voluptuous deeps, many of less honest attractions, yet none that are more generally sweet and welcomed in their seasons. So I say : Blythe Robin (into whose short life, we know, sad moments come from time to time), I'll take thee, thy song and thine opportune coming to my window as a propitious augury, —apply the knife, and let those look who will. As to the mighty, little "I"—without it there would be no ego ; at least no direct, open-handed, colloquial ego, only an academic one, presented in a sort of third-person garb of silk-hat and frock-coat. And what is an autobiography without an ego?—A potato without salt ; a beauty sans wit or scandal, humour or virtue.

One subject more, then you shall be at the end of this long portico to the house of words : Here there is no pale, borrowed glory by the irrelevant inclusion of the

doings of ancestors and relatives, nor any excusable padding in the shape of anecdotes of better-known men and women—usage has not been made to do duty for reason. Mine is a humble story, a record of small things, whereof the aggregate can alone prove the worth of telling them. It is a one-man load, the burden of which must be its success—or its foolhardiness. The aim has been not to drag in relatives, except where absolutely needful to the point at issue. As for persons of public importance—this is more an account of the wayside of life and its hard, unnoticed corners, than of its hill-tops and lime-lit places. Nor am I sorry at this; for I confess to being individualist enough to ride a horse of my own breaking, though it be to a fall, rather than to canter easily along a beaten track with another's man's horse beneath me. Not that those from whom I sprang (on a certain gusty day in October 1866 at Deepcar on the Don), along with all who are allied to me, ever did, to my knowledge, anything of which they or I should be ashamed to record here. Most likely some of them were not so moral as they ought to have been; but too much morality does not always make for the general good—you cannot have the piquancy of an olive in a custard, nor the reddish flavour of beef in a spring chicken, yet all go to the making of a meal. And so long as men and women are what they are, and ever have been, so long will the historian and the true fictionist have to put immorality into their work. But enough. My mother (who died when I was four years of age) came of an honest and thrifty stock, who owned the handlooms, in some cases two or three, wherewith they earned their livings, in the southern part of the West

Riding; where some of her brothers and sisters and their descendants now live. My father's forebears were more of the yeoman kind, and, on his mother's side, appear to have farmed their own land in the same part of the county. He, who in later life drifted to the coal mines and became a colliery official, was the grandson of a Yorkshire squire; but the latter apparently went to Van Diemen's Land in that colony's early days and was never heard of again. As to him and my father's mother (who, there is reason to think, was of mixed Irish and Scottish descent), there appears to have been a romance the truth of which I have not yet succeeded in disentangling from what may prove to be hearsay. One significant point is: all whom I can remember were fairly educated. Thus much for whence I came, not here set down either in shame or pride, but sufficiently to conform to polite usage as to give me warrant to proceed.

J. E. P.

Billericay. Autumn: 1910.

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PHASE ONE :
THE LIFE REBELLIOUS.

*"How oft, heart sick and sore,
I've wished I were once more
A little child!"*

MRS. SOUTHEY.

"I never saw so much essence of devil put into so small a vessel."

JOHN FOSTER.

MY VAGABONDAGE

CHAPTER I

A visitant from "that bourne"—I begin life, by killing—Imprisoned—Grandmother's birch—A new home—School—Moved again—Consistent truancy—Back to grandmother's—My friend Billy—Billy does me a turn.

NOT to cause an unpleasant taste at the outset of what must be the *hors d'œuvres* of this literary repast, but for the double purpose of starting with and maintaining some chronological order in these small events—all of which had, doubtlessly, larger effects in the matter of character-forming—and to fix on the reader's mind an item to which reference will have to be made again and again, I must revert to the death of my mother. Knowing quite well that in the narration of this incident the hard materialist will not believe me, also that many persons cannot imagine a meeting with a ghostly visitant unless it be accompanied by a collapse in fear, I still dare to affirm that what occurred took place exactly as it is related here.

My mother died of some disease following childbirth. The infant, then some fourteen days old, was taken away by our paternal grandmother; and my half-brother, who was about five years my elder, went to live with a brother of our mother's; thus leaving father and me to occupy the house. During daytime I was in the care of a neighbour's two grown-up daughters. It was their habit to come into the house at seven o'clock or so in the morn-

ing, awake me and attend to my necessities. The time was late in November; and one morning, about a week after the funeral, they brought with them a couple of their younger sisters, to the best of my recollection one of nine and one of seven years. While the elders were preparing the morning meal—father having gone to work—the question arose as to who should fetch my breakfast-cake from the cellar; these were small currant-cakes which were then made in continuance of my mother's custom. The cellar was both deep and dark, and the girl of nine offered some objections to going down there. Bear in mind, it was only some days since the dead had been carried out of the house. I well-remember how the elder girls looked meaningly at each other, then at me, and whispered to the sister who dreaded that dark cellar. Ignorant as I then was of their meaning, and not aware that I was saving the situation, I demanded to be allowed to fetch up my cake—as I had so often done before my mother's death. So a lighted candle was given to me. Then the girl of seven volunteered to bear me company; but *she* must carry the candle. To this condition I would not agree; the result being that we started together, each one bearing a candle. At the head of that long flight of stone steps I insisted on taking the lead. When we arrived in the cellar, I made straight for the stone table on which stood two or three earthenware bread-pans. On the floor, opposite the smallest pan, which contained my breakfast-cakes, there was a stool—or “buffet,” in West Riding dialect—for me to stand on; otherwise I could not have reached the inside of the pan. Putting my candlestick on the table, I climbed to the post of vantage, and was stretching an arm in after the cake, when the girl, who was some five or six feet behind me, let out a scream of horror, dropped her candlestick clattering to the floor and ran shrieking to the steps, up which she disappeared, crying in

tones of such fright that I still hear them, "A man in white! A man in white!" I have also a faint remembrance of an immediate hubbub overhead.

By this time I had turned half-about on the stool, just far enough to see, in the farther part of the cellar, a figure in white. To me, the ghost had none of that grey mistiness which is commonly said to be the hue of the risen dead. What I saw was what I had seen a week or so before this—namely, the pallid face and snowy robe, with red moss-roses (my favourite flower, inherently, in later life) from the throat to the hem, which I had been taken to see "sleeping in a box," and was lifted up to kiss its white cheek. That was all. Then, leaving the candle burning on the table, and ignorant to this day as to why I so behaved, I stepped off the stool and made steadily for the foot of the stairway. Meanwhile that clattering and shrieking continued above; and out of it every now and then came the running of some one to the head of the cellar steps and the frantic calling of my name. Just as I approached the bottom step, the figure came to my side and seemed to put its right hand on my head; but I felt nothing. Here one of the older girls and the one of nine came to the head of the stairway and shouted for me to go up. Irrespective of this, so it seems to me now, and apparently so of the white figure at my side, I began the ascent—feeling, in a sense, that the hand was taken from my head at the first of those walled-in steps. Just as my foot touched the top step, one of the young women laid such hurried hands on me that, before I knew what was happening, I had been bundled out of the house; and the door was banged behind us, but with such indifference as to whether it fastened or not that it was afterwards found to have been left half open. Then came a stampede in the wake of the fear-stricken one, who was being hastened home by one of her elder

sisters, while the other young woman and the girl of nine swung me along between them.

The impression on my mind, both in the cellar and immediately afterwards, was one of such wonderment that fear had no chance even to raise its head. I was dumbfounded, and was probably acting in a quite mechanical manner—except that I appeared to know there was no danger to me. Of the supernatural as something too awful for attempted analysis I have never had any sense; nor was it till I had seen a man go blaspheming over the Great Divide that death was anything more to me than a change from the certain to the uncertain. Perhaps it was because of these matters being in my composition that I acted as I did. But whether or not my behaviour was due to sheer wonderment and to other springs of involuntary action, the idea grew with me, not then clearly as it did in after years, that I had left that deep, whitewashed, candle-lit cellar under a new kind of protection—a protection, or rather the idea of it, that was to occur to me again and again after moments of real danger and in times when everything appeared to be so black against me that had I been one of such a make the end would have been sharp and immediate. Not that the idea of this presence, this protection, was always in my mind; had it been so I should have kept out of much of the trouble and incidental wickedness of later years. On the contrary, this thought mostly came to me, till I had passed through those days of privation in Cardiff, when the danger was over or the harm was done.

Perhaps the reader will not be surprised to hear that I was not taken back to what we may term the haunted house, for it then became known as such. In the following week my grandmother came and took me away to share the home of my baby-sister. But my father remained in the house some months longer. From

certain happenings and from stories concerning him in previous times, I know that he had no fear of ghostly visitants; also that, in common with his mother, he was supposed to possess the "gift" of seeing any such apparitions whenever they were about.

Now, having recorded the foregone incident in its proper place, and perhaps with some regard to its inner significance, let me try the well-nigh hopeless task of catching a whiff of the atmosphere of things as I blundered through them in subsequent times. Looking back at those early years, it would seem that my worst misfortune, next to being motherless, was that of having been born a boy with certain indications of a girl's temperament. The earliest remembered instance of this was my affair with a particular gander belonging to Farmer Rycroft—the big, blustering man of outward passion, inward subtlety and (to me, then and thereafter) a never understood antipathy to the man who stood to me as a paternal grandfather, and whose immediate neighbour he was.

It was the morning habit of his gandership to lead his small flock down to the pond by the village green; and, when not roaming at large over the neighbouring fields, I generally spent the most of my waking hours in or near the pond. (At that time I was about five years of age. Three months previously my dignity had been promoted from petticoats to knickerbockers and a "sleeved" waistcoat that buttoned to the breeches in place of braces. Now, just as much more courage as there is in trousers than in their infantile abbreviations, so much more is there in the latter than in short skirts—at least, so run the ethics of tender years.) On this occasion I was marching at slow pace across the Green. The season was summer; the day warm, and my thoughts were engaged on whether I should go paddling in the brook that fed the pond, or creep into the pinfold and

lie down. Meanwhile, my cogitations were assisted by the munching of a piece of bread-and-butter, with which I had stolen away from the breakfast-table—owing to my lynx-eyed, small, wiry and energetic grandmother being out of the room. The gander and I had indulged in a continuous feud since the early spring; and before I quite knew what had happened he had come noiselessly along the grass, darted his head around my arm, snatched the bread-and-butter, and was away into the pond.

In this case Mahomet could *not* go to the mountain. I sat down, shed some silent tears, then arose, and threw stones at the bird until my arm ached. Then came another pause, which I ended by going home. There I secretly procured a larger piece of bread and a medium-sized household hammer. With these I returned to the pond, and enticed my foe to the edge of the water by the bread, while I kept the hammer behind me—as though he would know, if he saw the hammer, what it was for. I knew his fellows and the whole harem would come after him; also that their respect for the powers of his beak would keep them in the rear when the prey was a solitary piece. So I did not fear the crowd, but nimbly retreated, baiting him with the bread as I went.

Having put a sufficient distance between us and the pond I halted, and braced my strength for the attack. On he came, like the brave he was—to give him his due. But he had grossly outraged my feelings, and I could not then relent,—for to the feminine disposition ill-used “feelings” form one of the worst of outrages; and until experience had developed reason “feelings” were compelled to take its place.

With head stretched out and mouth open he arrived, grabbed the bread, and—as he was turning away, for he was a most unmannerly enemy—I crashed the face of the hammer on the top of his head. He fell—as Lucifer

fell. But so great was my spleen, so little my thought—another proof of having absorbed too much of the mother's nature—that I instantly dropped on my knees, and struck him even a heavier blow just back of and below his left eye. Here his head was crushed between the hammer and the earth.

The flock hurried screeching back to the pond. His left wing quivered; his legs stiffened; the blood mingled with the grass; I dropped the hammer, sank on my knees, took his head on my lap, and began to blubber ten times more than I had done at the loss of my first piece of bread. From the savage state to one of the greatest compassion and remorse was but a step.

My impulsive brutalism had been seen by two of the village wives, and they arrived on the scene at about the third bar of my lamentations. Bloody and half-blinded with tears, I was hauled away from the victim. One ran for my grandmother, and told the news to Dame Rycroft as she went; while the other alternately scolded me and pitied the dead gander. In a few minutes two-thirds of the village had gathered. Some gazed at me in horror, some in a reverie of wonder, and a dozen or so in envy.

On my grandmother drawing me away—she giving all and sundry long lashes with that feminine weapon for which she was locally famous, the farmer's ample wife silent and sad far beyond the needs of the occasion, and I sobbing like one who had lost his all-in-all—there were, so it runs in my subconsciousness, three remarks from as many female tongues, thus—

"That boy's a limb o' Satan's—he's niver out o' mischief."

"No,—an' he'll be draahned i' th' pond or dyke sum day as sure as——."

"Draahned? Not he! Them as is born ta be hung niver gets draahned, onyw'ere."

During the two following days I was a close prisoner, by way of punishment; for, much as corporal penalties, most of them well-deserved, were to be mine in the years then to come, my grandmother never raised her hand against me. Considering her character for general sharpness and lack of sentiment, this was remarkable; and all the more so in view of the fact that it had been her habit to birch my father and his brother whenever they committed any serious boyish offence—perhaps that was why my uncle ran away from home in early life, and was only heard of at long intervals as the years went by. Yet this could have been only partially the cause—seeing that also two of my four paternal aunts went abroad; that Aunt S——, who had always kicked against conventionality (even while soundly trouncing me for doing the same), finally developed into a rover; that my father disappeared in later life, and I became another rolling stone. These facts at least prove that the wandering instincts must have been fairly strong on that side of the family. But, to do my grandmother justice, she never used her birch in the heat of temper. On the contrary, it was her unbroken custom to inflict the punishment when the delinquent was ready for bed; this was maintained even though the wrong had been done early in the morning. To repeat one instance, which I often heard mentioned: She sent my father, who was then a boy of about twelve years, down to the village for some green paint. At that time the home-stead was a farm a mile out on the high road. As green paint was not to be had just then he bought some drab, and found that he had twopence to spare. On his way back through the village he came upon some boys playing with marbles. After thinking the matter over, he bought a pennyworth of “stonies” from one of the lads, intending to sell them back as usual when he had won some. But fate was against him. He lost them

all; then spent the other penny in the hope of retrieving his fortunes. He lost again, and took his way home, knowing that the birch would be his portion when night came around; so it was. After being punished for spending the money without leave, he was further chastised for losing the marbles "because they were not his to lose."

During my imprisonment three things happened: Farmer Rycroft exacted full payment for the victim, and did his best to keep it as well; the gander was cooked, and the household—minus me, as a little more punishment—exerted itself to eat the patriarch; finding this to be a task beyond their powers, some of the bird was given to me. But, thus far, I was nothing of the hunter—I could not eat my own killing. On my being once more allowed at large it was to find that I had been nicknamed "the little Fenian." All the same, however, and seemingly unknown to all except my grandparents, I was, even at that age, the subject of a melancholy as peculiar as it was unaccountable (witness that strong, subsequent liking for graveyards); for a more healthy and hardy boy of my years there was not to be found in the district. During the remainder of that summer this trait occasioned me many a grievous short spell at the fact that I could not go to mourn over my victim; because, instead of burying him, as I considered they ought to have done, he had been finally given to the pigs.

With the beginning of autumn my father fetched me to a new home he had made at Whitwood, some nine miles away and about five from Wakefield. There I began to live a life that was new to me in several ways, but mostly so in its pains and penalties. A working house-keeper had been installed, and to her I had no existence. True, she did not hate and cause me thrashings, as her successor did; so far as it lay in her power she ignored the fact that I was there. Looking back from now, it is

easy to see how humane was my tongue-sharp grandmother in refusing to allow my baby-sister to be committed to the care of a strange woman. She would not part from the child, who was named Mary, after our mother. It was here, apparently, that the young sapling began to grow so awkwardly irregular, although it probably had in it a natural tendency for that undesirable lack of direction. Yet who can say that the whole matter, first and last, was not the arrangement of a power as unseen, as uncounted at the time as its purposes were munificently formative? For—

Feel how we may, in sufferance long and keen,
Cast down, maligned, repentant, hopeless, tost
On wildering waters full of biting spleen,
When all we cherished seems for ever lost,
And all we seek's not worth the bitter cost;
Still in and through and round our finite stress,
By us unseen, unguessed though often crossed,
There works a beneficent mightiness.

But it is all too early yet to moralize; that will come soon enough when the turbulent waters of despair are swirling around. So let me hasten back to the story by saying that my father at once began to teach me "my letters"; this was in the evenings, and the way that I took to them pleased him greatly. But under Mrs. Dash's lack of supervision I came and went, got into trouble and out again, tore my clothes and revelled unwashed, ate or hungered all at my own sweet will—except, of course, when my father was about. Nor were there any penalties to pay for all this unbridled freedom,—only when the head of the household happened to rouse up from his wide and general reading, his closer study of Culpeper's "Compleat Herbalist"—in the universal qualities of which he was a profound believer—and from the excess of time that he gave to his occupation. These occasions were usually when he found me missing a whole day at a stretch or heard of some un-

toward escapade on the part of a boy who was then hardly six years of age. Then he and Mrs. Dash discussed the matter; I was found guilty of the crime termed intractability; the result being correction and painful wonderment that a lad was supposed "to behave" and act according to precedent, with consequent misery and nothing to sob it out to except the loneliness of my little room. But presently there came a new influence. I was sent to a dame's small school close at hand, and there found, in the person of my teacher—who must have been some two or three and twenty years of age—one who seemed to divine all there was in and about me. My readiness in the lessons made me a favourite from the start. In simple truth, judging by similar matters in later years, I found no labour in them. I could no more understand her gentle, winning mistress-ship over my wild ways, her sympathy with my isolated condition—for I was not given to the company of my kind—and the interest she took in drawing me out of my loneliness, than I should have comprehended an angel direct from heaven. But, alas! this episode was all too short to have any lasting effect—the soil was too much given up to rank weeds for a flower to have a chance of flourishing there. Soon after the opening of this new window in my house of life, we moved again—this time into lodgings at the farther end of Normanton, because a suitable house could not be had. There for some months I was allowed to do as I pleased. I had not even the careless care of Mrs. Dash. That person had found more interest in remaining at Whitwood than in accompanying us. I was sad at leaving the place, was amongst what I always disliked in those days and mostly feared, strangers; therefore nearly every hour of daylight went in and about a neighbouring farmyard and in rafting with some loose planks on a large adjacent pond—the wonder being that I was not drowned there. Then

I was sent to Normanton church school, a large stone building with many big boys and girls—sons and daughters of farmers generally—in the classes, and with, nearly opposite, a small preparatory school whereof I was to know something in the future. There, in what was to me a great crowded building, the snail shrunk into its shell at the first touch. On my being examined for a class I proved to be tongue-tied, dull, and was set aside, to be drafted a few minutes later into the hands of a young male teacher. Within an hour the “bright boy” at Whitwood was “a dunce” at Normanton. Before the morning had passed I had been rather severely caned for inattention; at the same time my particular observation was directed to the wooden horse; with a birch dangling from a string around its neck, near the master’s table. Then noon came to my release, and that schoolhouse saw me no more for weeks. Nor was it known for some time that I consistently played truant; when the truth leaked out, I received a thrashing and pursued the evil of my ways.

Normanton was then an ordinarily large village at the old end, with some ironworks, shops, the fair-ground, etc., clustered about the railway station; and with a broken continuance of cottage, shop, chapel and public-house over more than a mile in the direction of Wakefield. It was at the farther end of this stretch where we then lived. The whole place was much in the shape of an Old English capital *J*, with Love Lane as the lower arm of the letter, and the ancient portion of the village congregated on the end of the upper arm and down the fancy, added front. And here it was, amongst some small, new houses, where the lane joined the high road (*i. e.* at the junction of the back of the letter to its lower arm), that my moving camp was presently pitched. In other words, my father had secured a house, and there we went. For some little time the household work was

done by a neighbour's wife. Then some hitch occurred in the arrangements, and once more I was domiciled at my grandmother's—with the express stipulation that I was to be sent to school in the interval, he having paid some attention to me in this way during the time in which I persisted, pains and penalties withstanding, in not going to Normanton school.

Here I had a joy such as I had not previously known : the company of my pretty baby-sister; and here there was even less schooling than I had received at home. At the outset I was sent to that little house of mental correction; but found fishing in the lake to be more attractive. Then I was taken, got into trouble forthwith and broke away within an hour. Much the same process was repeated a few days later. Next, owing to grandmother's failing health and to Aunt S——'s disregard of me, except in the matter of promiscuous punishment, I was permitted to run as wild as I ever had been. And this brings me to my friend Billy, the parson's goat—at least it runs in my mind that he belonged to the vicar; but I am not quite sure on this point. Besides, it is a little hard to understand why so good a man should own so bad a beast. However, assuming that such was the case, Billy's private territory was his master's paddock. He was very select in his choice of visitors. To the best of his ability he always resented the intrusion of strangers. He and I, however, soon made friends, as I had often done with other refractory animals—by the initial act of feeding. But he regularly refused to admit me to his grounds until I had given him whatever I chanced to be eating at the time. This done, I could enter, and now and then enjoy a ride on his back. There were occasions when I called with no sop for my horned Cerberus; this was generally when I had been away from home most of the day and was returning there, tired. At these times Billy would meet me at

the corner of the wall, where the top stones were out and I climbed over. Then he would look into my empty hands, next up at my face with an expression that said—as I see it now—"Is there no friendship or gratitude in the world?" and turn away.

When this occurred I might fondle and caress him as I pleased, or romp about and pretend to butt him—always at a safe distance—yet he took it all with a sad eye, even as a maid takes the attentions of a man whom she is bound to accept although she loves another. But if I produced a mouthful from my pocket—the sweeter the better—though the cloud on his face was never so dark, the sun of his heart shone through his eyes at the instant. Then, when he had eaten the unexpected titbit—and only then, for he was as particular and nice in his habits as a goat could be—we would enjoy the happiest gambol that ever a goat and boy had in this world.

But though he was unkind on occasions, he repaid it with kindness and services, as witness the time when Tom Bowen, the big awkward bully of the village, had been venting his ill-feeling on me.

Three days after the affair Tom came to see a young squirrel that I had got by chopping and changing in a neighbouring village. When the inspection was over, Fred Reynolds proposed that we should have a game of single-wicket on the Green. Tom demurred on account of my being too small to be of much use in bowling, stumping or fielding; then he agreed, and we set out for the Green. On arriving there Fred found that he had come without the ball, and returned for it, while we proceeded to insert the stumps and otherwise make ready. It was upwards of half-a-mile to his home—I had never possessed such things as cricket gear. The vicarage bordered the Green, and I sped off with a new purpose in my mind.

Very quickly, for time was precious, I reappeared and

called Tom to come to me—I had something I wished to show him. He came readily enough, and I determined that he should suffer the more for his offensively patronizing manner. I said I would show him where to get some earth-nuts for his Belgian hare. He seemed pleased, replied that he was glad of the chance to obtain them, and I led him straight to the gap in Billy's paddock wall. To inspire confidence in him that all was well I entered first; he followed, and we passed the side of my bearded friend's small house,—in which I had just previously shut him up, out of sight. A dozen yards farther on I pointed out the leaves springing from the nuts; then, while he knelt down to dig them up with his knife, I slipped softly back, released Billy, and turned aside to the opposite wall.

What occurred during the next minute I never knew. I was busily looking for more earth-nuts, and my occupation and the silence of the bright afternoon were interrupted by a scream from Tom. I turned, and saw that Billy had charged him in the rear while in a stooping position, caused him to turn a complete somersault, and was then attacking him as he lay on the grass.

To prove my concern and compassion, I—knowing that my friend would then take no heed of anything less than force—ran up and tried to coax Billy into a more pacific mood. Meantime, Tom yelled, and received a bruise after each cry. Two farm-labourers looked over the wall and shouted something to me. Just then the vicar's gardener came in at a trot, and my ally was dragged off to his prison. Tom painfully arose, weeping, humiliated, vowing a future return for his sufferings, but never dreaming of their original cause; and, although we had a new ball to play with, he went limping off home without once thinking of the single-wicket.

CHAPTER II

An unintentional plunge—In close confinement—I overhear strange threats—Free once more—A council of war on a gate—Result, flight—An unexpected check—Home again—Domestic conditions—Reading matter—A great grief—Unfair punishment—Desperate retaliation—I leave home.

A FEW days after my friend Billy gave Tom Bowen such a pounding, one of the two ploughmen who had seen the affair, together with another, saw me on the top of a pollard willow that leaned over a wide, shallow brook. I was cutting a stick to make a bow.

"You'll cum tumbling off theer, youngster, an' that'll sarve yo' out for yo'r trick t'other day!" cried the former of the two.

My task absorbed me. The willow was nearly free. I gave a vigorous downward thrust on it, cutting at the same time, and splashed bodily into the brook below. They drew me out, soaked to the skin, and told me to go home. I answered that I wanted my knife before I went—it was a fine new strong pocket-knife, and as valuable to me as his flint-lock to an old-time Bedouin. I began to search, and they departed—one of them saying—

"That youngster's a born föel" (fool).

"Yes," I heard the other reply; "but theer's a lot o' t' Jack o' trumps in 'is doin's at times."

And many a time in later years those two remarks appealed to me as indications of how different persons see the same object.

At the end of an hour I found my knife, got possession of the willow—for why should I be half-drowned and have no reward?—and went home to change my cloth-

ing. I arrived at an inopportune moment. My grandfather had returned from the fields for something. He saw me, silently. Then, less any ceremony or delay, he gave me an introductory performance with my willow; next he handed me over to his daughter, S——, who—unknown to him, otherwise she would have paid for her additions—stripped, thrashed, drove me up-stairs, and sternly forbade me to leave the house again until she should say I could. Unfortunately for me, grandmother—who was still in failing health—happened to be away in the village at this time.

All the same, however, my close confinement was maintained in that box-like room, with its small, latticed window opening under the big eaves, the dark oak beams, and the Dolly Varden sort of paper on the wooden partitions which formed the inner walls. On the second evening of this incarceration I stole out of bed, through the fruit-loft and out on to the roof of the dairy, in a flood of beautiful autumnal moonlight. The temptation to go farther was great; I was small and went—knowing that Aunt S—— was away over the hill on some errand—the incommoding nightshirt tucked around my waist, my outdoor garments being prisoners in the great old-fashioned press. Before I had gone far along the smooth sward of the paddock, there came, from the other side of the thick orchard fence on my left, voices which I knew to be those of grandfather and Farmer Rycroft. Three remarks—then enigmatical to me, but more clearly understood in after years—entered my mind and have remained, almost word for word, impressed on the receptive tablet of memory. The voice of that exceptionally tall and straight old man, on whom I was accustomed to look as my grandfather, and who appeared to have none of the local pronunciation, said, in what I afterwards knew to be suppressed passionate resignation—

"It's a lie! I wasn't in the mess, though it looks like it!"

"The justice won't think it a lie. And if yo' doan't agree to let me hev the farm, I'll——" The remainder of the big farmer's threat was lost in my grandfather's vehement—

"You can do your worst, Rycroft; for, by God! I'll face it out before I take the roof off my family!"

I awaited to hear no more. Fear at being discovered, and the presence of a vague something, threatening and calamitous, yet unknown to me, sent me scampering back along the grass, up the great mound behind the dairy, over the stone-slabbed roof of the latter, and straight to my cot—there to lie panting, wondering and half-frightened; till Aunt S——, an hour or so later, entered with the supper of hot bread-and-milk which my grandmother had sent up.

My indoor period, consequent to the brook and willow affair—to which my janitress had raked up other matters of a worse savour, some of them being true—continued to the end of the fourth day. On my first reappearance in the outer world, one gloriously sunny morning when the air was sharp, I fondled Mary for a while, then went down the road, threw three well-selected stones at Rycroft's turkey-cock—this was in sheer exultation at my freedom, not entirely with a desire to do harm. Having crossed the Green—heedless that several pairs of eyes were watching me closely—I turned down a deep woodland lane, and presently was sitting on the top of a gate, kicking my heels against a bar below, and dwelling on certain hedging-in circumstances of my life. Of course the ethics of these things were then unknown to me; but, all the same, I dwelt long and deeply on those barriers. My seventh birthday was then drawing near.

It was early morning when I left the house. By mid-

afternoon I returned, to be met with upbraidings at having "already misbehaved" by not being in to dinner. These, however, fell on unregarding ears. My course of action was decided on, therefore all the hostile aunts in Christendom could talk themselves "black in the face," so be that they did not block my way. The personal is ever with us: I saw matters only from my own standpoint. Open rebellion against such powers would but proclaim me to be a greater blunderer than I was; yet there was far too much sedition in my pained heart for me to suffer longer under that regime, the unprincipled illegality of which made it all the more bitter. I would pack and go forthwith, to which end I went straight to my room and began to make a bundle of such clothes as I thought I should need during the next few weeks. My intention was to walk the seven miles home, the only regret being that I must leave my little sister behind; for, next to my inability to let alone the things which I ought not to have done, love for her had then become my paramount feeling. This separation cost me some tears as I continued with the bundle-making.

Then occurred the unexpected. A clatter of hoofs and the grinding of wheels came to a stoppage just outside, and in a few minutes I heard the voice of my father. Hastily pushing the half-formed bundle under my bed, I ran down-stairs, and learnt that he had come for me in a hired trap, because the nearest railway station (Wakefield) was three miles away. Another housekeeper had been secured, "a motherly person"; and I must go home, attend school, be "fitted for something in life, not grow up a Hottentot," etc. Hearing this, I bounded up-stairs again and destroyed all traces of the intended bundle, ere hands more deft than mine were should tackle the work of packing. To my father's desire to take little Mary back with us his mother would not listen

a moment, and I wept sorely for that reason. Would that *I* could have remained!

It was from this day that the most unhappy part of my early life began. An old proverb says, "Children are what they are made." I had no one to make me, except my own whims, a too original and overpowering notion of how a boy ought to pass his time, and those barring-in circumstances through which I so often broke—to my own physical suffering, and, doubtless, to the mental pain of others. The "motherly person" turned out to be anything but true to this description. Her greatest antipathy seemed to be children, with me for a capital letter in the forefront of all. Three years of almost unrestrained freedom and a saddling set of moods, which few persons heeded and none seemed to understand, had made me far from what I ought to have been. But had I been as black as she succeeded in painting me from time to time to my father—who was, as much wrapped up as ever in his old interests, and paid unaccountable heed to her, possibly because of the strong evidence there was against me—then I should have been black indeed. To her I was no more than "a smock-faced brat," which I afterwards learnt to mean that she hated me even for the girlish colouring of my face, and for the big crop of curly hair which was always as rebellious as I was periodically. In fact, this feature led to serious trouble between us. After the first week or so she insisted on combing it each morning; beyond preparing my meals, it was her only personal service to me, and to this day I am convinced that she did it because it gave her a show of reason for inflicting pain which she dared not put upon me openly. Before the end of the first month—during which I had irregularly attended Normanton school—she had wantonly caused me to receive two thrashings, the emphatic threat of another, and two weeks' loss of my regular Saturday

sixpence—which, as I was no lover of “sweets,” usually went into the till of the village newsagent and book-seller. At that time—much to the liking of my father, who cared not what I spent on reading matter—I was a “constant subscriber” to *The Young Folk’s Budget*, *Boys of England*, *Young Men of Great Britain*, and a weekly serial, almost as long as “Jean Christophe,” entitled “The Gipsy Boy.” The wandering, twilight-cum-sunrise, roadside, heath and woodland glade atmosphere of this last item in my periodic literature is with me still. The other pence were usually saved from time to time, then expended wholesale on sixpenny and shilling books, nearly all of which were, owing to the supervision of my father—whose literary tastes had been inherited from his mother—of the “standard” order. In brief, so far back as my recollection goes in this matter, I had copies of the poets down to Byron and his contemporaries; also of such pieces of prose literature, mostly fiction, as the publishers of cheap reprints are once more putting before the people. Like Ninon, I know not when I learnt to read; nor do I remember the day, subsequent to the Whitwood period, when I did not possess some reading matter which the most of my elders put down as being “beyond my years.” From this time till I was about eleven years of age, it became my father’s habit to make me read aloud from standard authors. In prose this ranged from Burton’s “Anatomy,” history, and translations from Marcus Aurelius, to “The Arabian Nights,” “Ten Nights in a Bar-room,” and “Crusoe”; in verse it was usually Young’s “Night Thoughts,” Thomson’s “Seasons,” Burns’ “Cottar’s Saturday Night,” and Byron’s romances. But I could not persuade him to see the beauties that I saw in “Lalla Rookh”; nor did the witching part of “Tam o’ Shanter” stir him as it did me. Curiously enough, the Lowland dialect was as easy to me as the reheating of cold soup,

or the fresh acquiring of a mother-tongue. Hood was then an enigma to me, and my father had "no patience with him." Truth to tell, it was this "everlasting reading," and the kind of matter that provided it, which made some of my mother's people—staid, irreproachable perseverers in life as they were—say I was "a rebel," "a rolling stone," etc. But this did not prevent them from being kind to me. As a matter of fact, they put the most of my wayward doings and strange tastes down as a grievous inheritance from my paternal grandmother, whom they did not like—a something for which I was not answerable, and no one helped me to uproot.

But to return to the trouble. My sister had sickened suddenly and died. From believing her to be running about in health and glee—except where Aunt S—— put a check on the latter—and always hungering to have her with me in my wanderings through woods and fields, I learnt that she was dead; the only sense of which I could grasp was—never to see her again. For two days I carried this grief in mind, heavier and more depressing to me than Sinbad's Old Man of the Sea was to him—a hungry truant from school, because I did not go home to dinner on those days, but wandered alone from morn till night. Then it was decided that I should not go to the funeral—whether because a black suit for me would have been too expensive, or for some other reason, I cannot say. Enough, more than enough for me, I should never see her again: because she was to be buried from her late home, and I left behind. The day of the funeral, a cold and dreary one, was spent by me heartbrokenly in the fields, with the shelter of a meadow cowshed in a shower of rain. Towards evening the usual thing happened—my grief turned to rage; and I went home, throwing stones at everything possible and savagely smashing all I could, including the windows of an empty cottage. In the matter of feminine influence

my mother's death had been to me—as seen afterwards—the diverging point in the Samian letter, and Mary's decease did but make the opening wider.

Immediately I was indoors the housekeeper made for me. She was entertaining a crony to tea, and the way in which a little flat bottle was whisked off the table and out of sight would have been indicative to any one except a child of Nature. That ever-missing sense of smell might have told me there was something more than the aroma of tea in the air. However, her show of authority came to naught. After a brief, open defiance I went to my room. Later on, when she had gone home with her crony, I did as I had often done before at such times, and did again on scores of similar occasions—went down to the pantry, took whatever I fancied, reascended to my room, bolted the door, got into bed, then ate and read till I fell asleep—leaving the candle to burn down and die in its brass socket, because sleep generally came upon me as I read.

On board-ship, and even since I grouped into the literary life, I have been awakened in order to ascertain whether or not death had crept upon me; the reason was my habit of lying so still and apparently breathless. Perhaps this was why the impressions of a previous night were still unblurred in my mind on the following morning, particularly during boyhood. So it was that I awoke, on this occasion, as if straight from my pagan mingling of grief and rage and a wordy set-to with the housekeeper. I went down-stairs “looking for trouble,” and the fates were propitious, the *casus belli* being my “mop”—a term that usually acted as a lighted match to my powder, which was rarely headed up. She, with aggressively unnecessary emphasis, *knew* that I had not combed it. I knew I had—enough for me, if not so for her; and I told her it was mine to comb or not as I pleased. She became uncomplimentary, saying finally

that she would comb it—"nicely"; and her rather small, dark eyes twinkled over a face of some flabbiness, the while she departed for the implement of torture, her squat figure, in a black frock trimmed with crape and shining beads, seeming to shake ever so gently, as if with inward laughter. For that was one of her traits—suddenly turning from the vituperic to smile a sort of acquiescence to whatever happened to be at issue; then as quickly to emerge triumphant, either to the physical pain or the chagrin of her opponent—the pain, of course, when I chanced to be the adversary. She was supposed to have seen better days; in such matters as heart and mind, I believe she had.

At any rate she immediately reappeared with the comb—a powerful, brass-backed article for which she had drawn on her own purse, feeling, no doubt, that she got her money's worth out of those morning tuggings. By this time the woman's peculiarities on such occasions had become fairly well known to me. As she entered the room again, her determination was woefully evident in that smile which played about her straight, thin mouth and somewhat dull features. On my side, I was quite as resolute not to be the sufferer; but I let the operation begin. Perhaps that initiative action was the weak part of my tactics. Then the fray began; and I had no sense whatever of the fact that my opponent was a woman. The accumulation of wrongs, the grief of the preceding few days, all topped by this unmerited pain, the cause of which was so plainly splenetic in my tormentor's unusual badinage, had stirred the very dregs of such deeps as there were in the nature of "the wandering little savage." Ah, well, years have turned that tragedy into a comedy; and I can now look back at it with no other feeling than a certain remorse, even while I know that all I gave was well-deserved. It is not for me to say here by what unsportsmanlike tricks I forced the

affair into a drawn engagement, while neighbours gathered outside and mouthed of police and murder. Talk of battles royal! That was a Homeric contest to which nothing less than a saga could do justice. Therefore I avoid begging the subject by giving details. But as complete silence on the matter of methods may cause me an unfair judgment in the reader's mind, I will say that my partial victory was due to what I had learnt from my friend Billy the goat—partial, because when I left the scene, although my adversary was doubled up on the floor by the wall, I was marked by my own blood, and I hardly knew whether there was a head on my shoulders or only a bursting feeling and a lump of confused pain.

Careless as to whether I had taken a life or not, I went up to my room, wiped away with a sheet such as I could of the traces of the fight, then threw myself on the bed. Presently the stairs creaked, heralding the approach of the housekeeper. At that I hurriedly bolted my door; the thing had no lock. She came to the door, and made it very evident that if she could have laid hands upon me then the results thereof would have been calamitous for me. At length she departed, promising strenuously that dire and numerous events should happen to me when my father returned. Then I heard her bedroom-door shut with a bang, and her moving about in the room and talking, there being only a lath and plaster partition between us. Yes, my conscience and experience were telling me, when he returns you will get——. I crept from the bed, like one of my favourite scouts on the trail of a scalp-hunter. In an instant my door had been silently opened and my head was outside. Here the moving thought was: Now is the time to get away, while she is in there. Then I saw the key of her door protruding outwardly from its lock, and my evil genius was instantly at work. I tiptoed to that key and turned it

with one motion, as gunnery phraseology says. What she was doing at the moment I, of course, cannot tell; but she appeared not to have heard the locking of the door. Now I could make my preparations unmolested; all the same, I went about them with as much quietness as speed would allow. A hurried wash; then a suit of clothes—my best ones—was bundled up in a winter muffler along with "The True Story of Dick Whittington and His Cat," which my half-brother had sent to me on my recent birthday, and I was ready to depart. On looking around the room, my one sorrow was at having to leave all my heroes behind. Here, with a new rush of feeling, I recollected that the housekeeper had, for two whole weeks, come between me and the doings of that wonderful "Gipsy Boy." There were no playthings to regret leaving, only my self-made bows and arrows, two pegtops, and an indifferent kite which had become mine by the "swapping" of marbles, in the winning of which I enjoyed such uncommon and continuous good fortune that I always had a few hundreds to spare on things that I could not otherwise possess—except at the impossible sacrifice of deserting my heroes for a whole month or so. No, it was my things of the greenwood, those real English weapons, which alone pulled at my heart along with the heroes. But I had to leave them, so I went, silently as might be. Down-stairs, the table reminded me that I had eaten no breakfast. Hastily the end of a brown loaf was thrust into my bundle, and my jacket pockets were crammed with whatever I could lay hands on. I might have gone to the extent of a larger and more varied stock of provender, had it not been that in the midst of my foraging there came a sudden and vigorous shaking of the housekeeper's door. At this warning I began my flight, heedless of certain inquisitive spectators outside.

CHAPTER III

Self-dependence—Some reflections—A lift on the way—In familiar scenes—Not a Whittington—A new pain—Heartless deception—Feet of lead—In the hands of the police—A haven—Long errands—A pound of raisins—Changing camps—On the road again.

WHAT was my destination?—not grandmother's. They would not let me be at Mary's funeral; now I had no desire ever to go there again—it was at the back of my stubborn little mind that wild horses should not drag me there. No, I would go right on to mother's people at Barnsley. Fourteen miles "by the road"—because twice seven made fourteen; seven to grandmother's, as I had heard so often, and seven more along the turnpike road to Barnsley, a fact which I had learnt from mile-stones. Well, what of that? I could do it in a day. Had I not, dozens of times during the past year, when I was supposed to be at school, been on my feet from early morn to nightfall, all the time roaming wherever fancy led me?—and with nothing more to eat than I could gather from hedgerows and orchards? Had I not already made several good meals on buttered bread stolen away from the breakfast-table and savoured with earth-nuts? It may be easily surmised, and better understood later on, that those years of freedom had developed in me a resourcefulness, a natural self-dependence without ever a thought of importance or consequence, such as no child of regular home-training could possess. Had I not been compelled to put what ingenuity I had to work to make playthings for wet days?—apparently doing such things in a manner that helped to keep my elders from spending money on me in that way; similar to the

miniature "pit-head" that I had set up to amuse sister Mary during the previous summer, and was constructed out of clock-wheels and a weight, some string, a strong, upright stick, and a "truck" that was drawn up an incline by the weight running down the stick. Not that my father was never kind to me. I can look back to occasions when he was more than kind, when he exhibited an affection and a pride which proved how he forgave my many and grievous sins; when he spent money on me freely, considering how little there was of it and hard to earn, but hardly ever in playthings. One point he always strove to attain—stir in me a spirit of emulation wherever the contest was one in which it would be a credit to excel. Since then I have very often had to thank that particular encouragement. Perhaps the one great fault was a lack of consistent tenderness, seeing the unusual conditions of my life, and in what direction they and my own shortcomings were moving me. Closer watchfulness and less stern commanding might have led to a better understanding of the rebellious enigma; for the reader may be assured that this record could be made much fuller on every count. His love of Burns and old songs of sentiment was not followed out in daily practice. It seems to me now that music was needed to put life into his sensibility, and that the ebb of this set in when the music ceased; to which the observer of life will add: So it is with thousands more.

Still, although I may be excused for laying bare some of the causes in others which helped to make me what I was, it were not wise or right in me too closely to analyze *his* actions towards me. So let me say that I was now out on the road, with the world before me. What I had so often told myself I would do I had done—run away from home. Verily, I was over the Rubicon, and my boats were burnt. Yet that feeling presently gave me an exultation which lifted me greatly along the

way. Past roaming had taught me a near cut across some fields,—one that would take me over Goose Common, clear of Warmfield (where we had some acquaintances living), and shorten my journey by a mile or more at the outset. From a hedge in the second of those fields I cut a stout stick, with which I slung the bundle over my shoulder, in imitation of the picture cover on my *Life of Whittington*, and as I had seen the Irish harvesters in actual life. Less than an hour before this my heart had ached to breaking; physical pain and injustice had turned me temporarily into a little maniac. Now the sun shone through the sharp air. Spring larks sang overhead. In spite of the disfiguring pit-heads on my right (the true ugliness of which I neither saw nor could have understood) the scene was one of beauty, the real soul whereof lay in my own unbounded freedom. In my pockets there was food and in my heart a swinging feeling of joy. I felt as if the world was mine, and I did not care a brass farthing who took it away, if only I went free. It was, indeed, a time to write ballads of the road and liberty—if but I had known how. All the movements and impressions of that morning are so vividly with me still that I feel and see them much as I felt and saw them then; and may some kind fortune ever keep a boyish corner in my heart. What the night was to bring me I knew not, thought not, would not have cared if I had been told, bad though it was to be. Life, in our youth the greatest of deceivers, is finally the greatest of awakeners; and before I reached my destination I was to be——. But a truce to this! The too reflective present is throwing a cloak over the incidental past. Let us out of the study to the fresh air, the more pleasing sights and sounds of the fields and the high road.

In the meadow beyond the Common I sat on a sunward bank, made a tardy breakfast, then swung along again—

to find good fortune almost awaiting me on the turnpike. Soon after I crossed the last stile, along came a tradesman's light cart, bowling down an incline from Warmfield and going my way. As it drew near I saw the driver—an elderly man—look hard at me, and as he rattled by he shouted, "What's the game, me lad?"

"Oh, nothing!" I cried back.

"Well, what's that?"—He was looking at the bundle on my shoulder; then stopped in the middle of his question, pulled up and asked, "But where ar' yo' goin' to?"

"Newmillerdam!" said I, without a pause, intuitively seeing that it would be unwise to give my real and more distant objective, and knowing that I should have to pass through grandmother's village, for which reason there was truth in my reply. He was then backing the cart and giving me a close examination generally.

"Like a ride?" he queried.

Before he could say more, I, with a mouthful of thanks, had thrown in my bundle and was clambering up to his side. Then off we went at a fine pace. I learnt that he was going to Wakefield, he—well, that the little tramp was from Normanton, on his way to relatives at Newmillerdam, and that the bundle contained his change of clothes; for I found his questions were becoming rather too much of a hedging-in nature. He was curious about the swollen appearance of my face and certain marks indicating force of some sort. But I put him off with, "Oh, had a whacking—that's all," and pestered him to let me drive. His interest in me was sympathetic, fatherly; it came near making me "out with it all," and would have done so had I not felt that the success of my purpose lay in keeping that purpose out of sight. He gave me a two miles' ride, sixpence when we parted at the end of Heath Common, he to go riding to the right, me to walk away to the left——. Left? Yes, and

walk : for were not these features of life to be my portion mostly? But the best of all were the inspiring glint of his keen yet kindly eyes, the live expression on his face and those cheery words, which I shall never forget—

“Keep yo’r heart up, lad; yo’ll get theer by-an’-by.”

So I did. But in a life where there has been so much of the prophetic by the way of allegory I am tempted to ask if that journey, its cause, its elated outseting and its depressing finish was allegorical of the whole? Tut! why ask the total of a sum till the sum is cast up? Seven times I have inadvertently knocked at death’s door, and seven times he has refused to open unto me. Is this not sufficient evidence that the faulty vessel may still have some cargo which is worth unloading? It is. But I am off my course again.

Having crossed the end of the heath and found the road to Walton—every turn of which I knew, because of having ridden over it several times—I pressed forward once more, the bundle again on the stick over my shoulder, and I as careless as need be that every passer-by and the cottagers on the wayside gazed at me as though I was some phenomenon.

About noon I reached the outskirts of Newmillerdam. Then came some misgivings as to whether or not I should get through the village without my being seen by those who knew me. There was no detour to be made, because I knew of none, in spite of all my previous wanderings in that locality. When once I struck the village my way would lie straight along the turnpike road, through the heart of the place, with no opportunity of turning aside except at the loss of much ground. Still, as grandmother lived a field’s width off the farther side of the village, I might pass unnoticed. So on I went, turned a corner—thinking of my erstwhile friend Billy, whose habitation was near by—and down a steep, short hill to the corner of the lake—locally known as “the

dam." Here I was in the village; and, suddenly realizing that the bundle on the stick would attract more attention than I wished for, the stick was quickly slipped between the iron palings into the lake, and I hurried along with the bundle under my arm—feeling that nothing should make me go to grandmother's, decidedly vengeful that I had not been allowed to be present at Mary's funeral, and wishing that I could find her grave. Luck, as I saw it then, was with me. In another quarter of an hour or so I was out of the village and away along the high turnpike above. After passing the house where my father was born, in the fields to my right, I gained a milestone on the sunny side of the road—just beyond a woodland gate where, some years earlier, a game-keeper had been found, one frosty morning, with his brains blown out. What verdict the coroner's jury had returned in this case I know not; but it was locally held that the case was one of murder, for the simple reason that the bloodstains on the white gate could not be painted out. Local superstition (and I believe this to be common in rural districts) said that the blood of a murder can never be erased. There I sat, ate and was satisfied. With my back in the corner formed by the milestone and the wall behind it, Brown Wood before me and King's Wood (where I had stolen many a pocketful of sweet chestnuts) over the wall, I paid no regard to the fact that not more than two hundred yards away there was a disused pit-shaft down which a tramp-woman had thrown two helpless children. After a little while I felt that I could have sat there till Doomsday, and not then have stirred till the last sound of the trumpet; no, not even if the locality had possessed as many murder-spots as it held trees, and there were more gruesome points of interest than are mentioned here.

But a woodpecker presently disturbed me, and I reached my Life of Whittington. Soon I came to where

it said that the bells of Bow church told him to turn again. Then I looked up and glanced about me. Yes, there was my bundle. But, no—cat I had none; so I could not be a second Whittington. Besides, if all the bells in Normanton and Newmillerdam and every other village within twenty miles of them had rung me back, I would not have striven to go. No, because, in addition to pride and stubbornness, on pulling my legs up I now found that they had considerably stiffened. Moving them at all was a painful affair. In virtue of my many long days at large, scores of which had been ten to twelve hours of wandering, I could not understand this. If help had not chanced along, night would have come down and found me still there. This was in the shape of another light cart, with two very young men in it. They were rattling away in the direction I wished to go; and as they drew near, I shouted—

“Hey, give me a ride!”

“Come on, then!” cried the younger of the two; and, snatching up my effects in odds and ends, I tore after them—feeling most certain pains, yet ready to suffer more for the promised “lift.” They incited me to greater speed, which I endeavoured to make; but the distance grew between us. I began to realize that they were having a joke at my expense, slackened down, stopped, and the last of them to me was their loud derisive laughter as the cart disappeared over a hill in the road. However, the run had done me the service of ending the most of that painful stiffness. I cut another stick, inserted an end of it under the knots of my bundle, shouldered the burden, and set out to master the remainder of my journey.

The first mile was covered without much trouble; the second seemed to be three in itself; the third was helped to the rear by the talk of a country-woman who overtook me. She asked where I was going, and I told her; then

from where I came, which I would not tell lest any one should take me back. For I had said to myself at the outset: If people don't know where I came from how can they take me back? Then the woman struck off at right angles, up a lane. The fourth mile might have been one of eternity's own, so long did it appear to be; and in walking the fifth I took six rests.

By this time the sun had set, and the thought of having the road for a bed, the night for a blanket, and the stars as a canopy gave me a little new strength. But, alas! it had a close kinship to the smile of a moody tyrant. The nonchalance that had made me sling the bundle over my shoulder was gone; my head hung down, face was sad, heart like liver; while, judging them by their weight, my feet might have been leaden ones, of their own size and growing larger at the end of every hundred yards I covered.

Thus I plodded on, half-stumbling over every little stone in the way, until the lights of the town began to glimmer on the height a couple of miles or so ahead. Several carts had passed, in Barnsley direction; but all their occupants had seemed too uncharitable to give me a ride, so I asked none; yet pride did not stop the ebbing of my strength.

At last I essayed to cross the road. The path on the other side had the appearance of being the better of the two. Just then a light wagon came crashing up. I cried out, and fear helped me to clear the horses' feet by about a yard, then I fell. The driver pulled up, swore at me, then asked what I was doing there. My bundle and stick, dimly seen in the light of his oil-lamp, apparently required some explanation. I arose, replied that I was going to Barnsley; again refused to say from where I came, was offered a ride, accepted it, and had to be lifted into the wagon. Once there and the thing restarted, I was plied with fresh questions, which soon

entered dull ears—for I almost immediately fell asleep, so great was my exhaustion.

When I awoke, it was to find myself in a very comfortable bed. Daylight was streaming into the room, and I could hear the rattle and rumble of much traffic. I moved. My legs seemed to have become tender sticks that would rather break than bend. As for my feet—they appeared to fill the bottom of the bed, and the pain in them had apparently awakened me. Soon afterwards the door opened quietly, and my wonderment was increased by the entrance of a strange woman. Finding that I was awake, she immediately learnt my physical condition, then went away. Presently she returned with a big, strong man, who wrapped me in a blanket and carried me after her, to what was evidently a specially prepared bath. Together they put me through the bath; and of all the tender handling that I can remember, the most abiding portion, the gentlest, came from those two homely Yorkshire souls. In the meantime there was a continuous flow of quiet talk, mostly made up of leading suggestions concerning myself. To the best of my recollection no direct question was asked; but the sum total of it all was a kindly sympathetic: From where had I come and to where was I going? Intuitively guarding my secret, I answered neither part of the question. So fixed in my mind was the notion that I should be taken back to Normanton, if any one learnt that I had come from there, that I was determined nothing should drag or wheedle the name of the place from me.

When the man had dressed me, most of my pain and stiffness being then in the past tense, I was regaled—regaled is the word—with breakfast. In place of my usual porridge and milk, or cocoa and thick brown bread-and-butter, there was hot, sweet coffee, thin white bread well-buttered, a boiled egg and some jam tart. Then came the question direct: What was my destina-

tion? Here I learnt that I was at a police-station, where my carter-friend of the previous night had left me. Knowing the name of the street in which an uncle lived, I told it and my uncle's name to the good Samaritans, and was at once taken there. Aunt Susan acknowledged and took me in, not forgetting to tell the sergeant from where I had fled, nor to give him a few of the striking features of my reputation. In this she was retailing second-hand matter, which probably accounted for her endeavours to enhance its value.

The foregone incident made me a "nine days' wonder"—how the members of the family flocked to see me; how they talked to and about me; how they told the ever-growing tale to others, and how everybody prophesied this, that and the other for me in the future! Let the reader imagine a little crowd of old-fashioned, plodding Puritan folk with myself in their midst, and he will have the case at a grasp.

Of course the news was sent to my father. He replied that he would be glad of their keeping me a while, and drawing on him for the cost. My uncle favoured me, and I remained—until I moved my own camp some three months later.

The *whole* of the following incident is given not because it is a mere fact, but as a just instance of how I lived and dealt with others at that time.

Aunt Susan—short and not fleshy, but taller than her husband, with a cast in one eye, a piquant tongue, and a heart that was always fighting a battle with itself as to whether it should be austere or kind—very quickly grew into the habit of sending me to order her week's groceries. At the outset she gave me a written list of the articles wanted—usually twelve to sixteen. Then she discovered my possession of an uncommonly retentive memory, and began to give me two-thirds, then a half, and finally no list. I had to repeat them after her, as she

examined her larder, and order them verbally. Aunt Susan was never proud of her penmanship, and this was done to stop its exhibition, it being one of the family's standing jests and a sore point to her. Her husband occasionally told her that some blunder would come of the process; but——. Well, she was a woman; and the man who has been schooled in the sex knows enough, while the other has much guilelessness to lose and considerable subtleness to learn. The shop was in the family, about a mile away, and in the course of that distance of road and streets I found many opportunities to do a backslide from rectitude.

It was a Friday afternoon when I was called in to be sent on the usual errand. During the enumerating of the required articles I made such a number of queries that my aunt exclaimed, "Oh, for the parish's sake,¹ lad, doan't ask so many questions! You're enough to make a body think you was born with a question in your mouth!"

"Well, per'aps I shall die with an answer in it," but was temporarily stopped by a promise to box my ears if I did not "behave."

On my return to the house the groceries had already arrived, and were found to be short of three articles—a pound of cheese, two of loaf-sugar, and one of raisins. Aunt Susan said that I must go back and *bring* them. I particularly wished to keep an appointment for the playing of a previously planned game, and observed that my Cousin Maria—a year younger than myself—should go, because I had been once.

Aunt Susan warmly answered that Maria was a girl—which fact I logically deducted from her petticoats—and not a boy to go into town on errands. Moreover, I deserved the punishment for not remembering all the things on the first journey.

¹ This meant that if the speaker persisted the parish would be put to the expense of keeping him or his listener in an asylum.

I must go. I went, ordered the cheese and sugar, and returned with the raisins. Over the rear of the garden wall at the back of the house I climbed, curled myself up in the wheelbarrow, and began to eat the raisins in moody silence and revenge. All the way to the shop I had decided to do this, and I was still doing it when Maria found me, and ran post-haste into the house with the news, just as night thickened its shadows.

When Aunt Susan hurried down the garden and found me sullenly squatting in the wheelbarrow finishing her week's stock of raisins, she hustled me straight into the house, and gave me as severe a thrashing as if she had owned the rights of my mother, yet lacked the mercy of that relationship. At the earliest possible moment after the punishment I stole a big apple, left the house, threw a stone at the door, and ran off in the darkness to Aunt Hannah's. Within fifty yards of the latter's house I met a smaller boy than myself. He had been sent to buy some matches, with a threepenny piece which he had lost, and was crying. This interested me. I gave him Aunt Susan's apple, coaxed him not to cry, and said we would find the money. Time was of no account to me; for there was all life ahead, and evidently nothing to do in it. The place was very quiet, and it was an hour later when his elder sister found us—he no longer weeping, the apple gone, and our hands quite black with grubbing. At that instant, by a little isolated mound where we had not looked, we found the coin. He explained matters—with my interjected assistance; they went their way, and I went mine.

On entering Aunt Hannah's house I blurted out what I had done, my return for doing it, said that no one had any business to send me so far to order a lot of things, and finally announced that if they sent me back I would go right away and join the gipsies.

"Gipsies!" said my aunt, contemptuously tossing her

head. "Goodness knows you're rolling stone enough now; and as for gathering moss——."

"I think you'd better roll him into some soap and water, and gather some of that dirt off his hands," quietly said her husband, as he left his chair. "Then give the lad some tea while I go down and see Will about it—and that will do more good than your preaching."

Thus was I allowed to stay there—until more reckless doings made my well-meaning aunt declare that unless I were at once sent home (or to Jericho, if but I gave her no further trouble) she would certainly leave the house. Happening to hear some of this emphatic statement, I took umbrage at it; and the following day saw me footing my way back to Newmillerdam. The utter sensitiveness, that ran cheek-by-jowl with those nomadic propensities to which the most of my truancy was due, was again at work, causing me pain—as it had so often done before, though it was never then recognized as being at the root of so much trouble. But let me not dwell on the pathetic part of the story; enough that it peeps to recognition here and there.

CHAPTER IV

A lordly feeling—I meet an acquaintance—Nail-making—A great feast—Once more a traveller—A fair and no pence—I make a sudden appearance—A “benefit,” herrings and potatoes—A hard-earned sixpence—Exchanging opinions—A battle unroyal.

TIME, sensitiveness at my “not being wanted,” and a disturbing tendency to act on passionate impulse had all combined to make me prefer Newmillerdam and all its drawbacks rather than remain where I was assured that “my place was better than my company.” So it was that I fared forth once more; but this time I had neither bundle, book, nor bread. I was, indeed, a tramp with “no visible means of subsistence.” Yet in this newness of situation there was a feeling of pleasure, a sensation of being more my own master than ever. Since I left home, pence had come my way much more rarely and irregularly; so that my heroes had all passed into the background of happenings, and there were no regrets at my departure concerning them. Indoor conditions had made it practically impossible for me to get either clothes or food surreptitiously on this occasion. The decision to be gone was sudden, overpoweringly so, and emphatic. Hence I was away through the town, down the hill, and trudging along the turnpike below ere I thought that seven miles must be covered before I could break my fast again. However, the day was young and fine; interest abounded by the wayside; I had the exhilaration of feeling freer than ever—a man in comparison to the weary little thing that fell on the road hereabouts and was carried helplessly into the town some five months previous to this. Then I came upon an acquaintance—

an older boy who had played Slasher in "The Peace Egg" at Christmas, in which I had been Little Devil-Doubt. His parents were then living in an outlying village, and he, after having spent the night with some relatives in the town, was on his way home. To him I did not mind telling my story, because he could not take me back to Barnsley—even if he had desired to, which I felt sure was not the case. Besides, I had a notion that no one could make me return, owing to the fact that my proper home was not there.

So we journeyed along together till, at what should have been the parting of our ways—when the town was an indistinct blur of stone and smoke on the skyline behind us, and in the middle distance grey-stone houses and other buildings, black pit-heads and towering red-brick chimneys, showed their outlines more clearly—then my companion asked me to go home with him and have some dinner. This was enough; I went, and at about eleven o'clock we showed our faces at his parents' cottage. Dinner was then an hour and a half away; but this was largely a nail-making village, named Mapplewell. And, ever eager for anything new to me, almost always able to become deeply interested in whatever was fresh, without the least effort on my part (an unacquired trait to which I owe much), off I went from smithy to smithy—little, dark brick-sheds or outhouses, in each of which a small furnace glowed like a deep, red patch on black, and two men, or a man and a boy, made wrought-iron nails at a speed that held me speechless. There I stood at the doorways, watching the thin lengths of black iron turn into ruddy bits and drop to the boxes below; till I soon asked if I could blow the bellows, and jumped to do so in the middle of the nail-maker's conditional permission—the condition being that I should do it properly. Thus went the time till work was stopped for dinner, and I was asked why I did not go home to

mine. Evasive answers were made, the while I handled the different tools, and wanted to know if I could not be allowed to make a few nails. Then came the partial admission that I was far from home—was going to New-millerdam—had no dinner—would rather make nails than eat, etc. At this the men gave me a closer examination, apparently saw that I was somewhat different in dress and that from their village youngsters, and began to whisper to each other. Then they offered me a portion of their meal. At that moment, however, I felt a change in the atmosphere of things, saw my acquaintance a little way off, and ran to him. He was looking for me, and took me to dinner. And what a meal! Oh, for half the power of table enjoyment such as I then had! In later life we speak of it as “digestion”; concerning it in those years I should term it gusto. Boiled mutton and vegetables without stint, suet dumplings till I felt that the buttons would come off my waistcoat, followed by the barley-broth until capacity flatly refused to accommodate another drop. Nor was there to wonder at this generosity. Not only has the “county of broad acres,” baked batter-pudding and horses (in the past it was as much horse-thieves as horses) always been famous for its hospitality to the stranger; as I afterwards learnt, nail-makers at that time—who corresponded to the wide prevalence of handloom weavers in earlier days—could easily earn a pound a day. So large were their earnings, in fact, that they regularly shut up their “shops” on Friday night, and never reopened them till Tuesday morning, often enough not until the following day; and the bulk of the money went as it came—in drink, rabbit-coursing, expensive holiday-jaunts, secret cock-fighting, and pianos for daughters who could neither write nor speak twenty properly consecutive words in their native tongue, and knew but little more of music.

However, much as I wished to see more of the nail-

making, the mother of my friend persuaded me to be moving towards my destination, which was then between four and five miles away, and the days were still rather short. To further the object, she—to whom I had merely said that I was going to my grandmother's—sent her son to show me a near cut across some fields and up a lane, by which means I should cut off a mile or more. The afternoon was half-gone when we parted on the highway, never to see each other again, apparently. In some curious manner we both felt this, I believe; for we were mutually loth to say good-bye. He went a little way with me along the turnpike, then I returned with him to the end of the lane, and so on, till his wiser resolution forced the parting. The briefest of invitations from him would have taken me back to the village, and by half an invitation from his elders I should have become a nail-maker's boy there and then, till the next sudden change came along. Thus my face was once more set steadily towards Newmillerdam, with, presently, that lightness of heart which is such a providential blessing to the young. It is true that my pocket was so light as to cause uneasiness; but great was the fulness elsewhere, with an uneasy feeling of another kind. All the same, I stepped out briskly, gaining internal comfort and assurance as I went along, and even finding fresher joy in freedom and movement. And why should I feel otherwise? Was I not a traveller by this time?—a great traveller with all the world in which to come and go! Of course I was; and in this mood I continued onwards, to be pretty quickly scared nearly out of my wits. I was going down an incline, with a stone wall—so common in those parts—on my left and some scattered timber on the other side of it, when suddenly over the wall, scarcely three feet behind me, came a horseman. I shouted in fright, and leapt forward. The man called out reassuringly, as he gathered himself back in the saddle, and his

horse thundered away down the road. It was some little time before I was quite myself again.

With nothing further to record than the passing of occasional grown-up tramps and vehicles, I reached the nearer end of the village, in the early part of the evening, to find there a sort of fair in full swing. There I lingered a good hour, meeting a few acquaintances of a similar age, whom I hardly knew or who knew me; sad that I had neither money, marbles, pegtops, bows, nor anything else by which to raise a penny. Then, seeing no prospect of "a treat," I took my way through the darkness over the grassy hill to grandmother's, opened the door and walked in as if I were just from an errand, to find my grandparents sitting by the fire. How that old man—so tall and straight and grey, like my mother's father—gazed at me from under his protruding eyebrows, but there was nothing unkindly in his expression. On the contrary, my grandmother—who then seemed to have regained her normal state of wiry health and energy—fixed her greeny-brown eagle-like eyes on my face in a way that appeared to go through me to the great old press-bed, that was shut up in its Spanish mahogany cupboard sort of recess on the other side of the room, and was used only on special occasions. There had been a time when I thought that she did not go to bed like ordinary folk, but slept a kind of cat sleep, fully dressed, and ready to spring at an instant's notice. Now her manner revived this idea, as she sat upright in the high-backed wooden arm-chair that made her seem to be shorter than she was. With the firelight glinting across them, her eyes were like great drops of dew in the sunshine; and the same ruddy flames in the big open chimney—for candles or lamps there were none—threw her thin nose and somewhat sharp chin, the healthy-tinted cheek that had sunk far enough to leave the cheekbone high, and the iron-grey hair into strong relief. It

was a scene that I shall probably never forget—the low-pitched room; the big oaken beams overhead and the boarded floor above in place of plastered ceiling; the far-reaching, round mahogany table, with its spread-eagle feet, in the middle of the floor, and strewn with a few books of the religio-ornament kind, three or four daguerrotypes in stand-up frames, and in the centre a family Bible, on which stood a piece of brilliantly blue and red old Staffordshire ware for flowers; the chairs, covered with black horsehair, close to the walls; the chiffonier, and its case of waxen blooms, at the back, and myself between it and the table, curiously fearing and silent, yet with defiance pricking at the bottom of it all; and all in that flood of ruddy light which came out of the great open fireplace, and was enough even to show up the high mantelpiece and its tall brass candlesticks, a pair of china dogs, and a large, hollow, opal-coloured glass rolling-pin containing a picture in crude reds and greens.

Then the silence was broken by those incisive tones, the penetrating, commanding quality of which makes them well-remembered still.

“And where’s thou come from?” she asked sternly.

“Barnsley,” said I, with a certain sense of foreshortening for trouble.

“Where from?” grandfather asked, in more surprise than anger.

“Barnsley,” I repeated simply, then edged a pace to his side of the room. Oh, for the pride, the Alexander-cum-Tamerslain feeling which had so rioted in my bosom when I left the town that morning! Now I was the veriest of cast-downs, with the sensation of being guilty of all the worst crimes in the calendar, yet would have fought against an accusation of the smallest of them. As smartly as a sentry could come to attention, shoulder arms and step off, the old lady rapped out query

after query on how I came to be at Barnsley; how I got there; why I went; what had I been doing there; with whom I had lived, and why and how I had left; with, after every two or three questions: "Does thy father know that?" Towards the end of this inquisition—when I began to understand that neither of my examiners had been previously aware of this sojourn at Barnsley—grandfather turned towards the fire again, saying laughingly—

"That lad'll join the gipsies yet."

"No, I shan't! They steal and go to prison," I blurted out.

"So will thou," was her sharp rejoinder, against which, combined with that holdfast gaze of hers, I could hardly keep up my head. Whether she meant that I should go to prison as a purloiner of hen-roosts, or for some other reason, I never learnt. But it has often occurred to me since then that the spirit of prophecy sat on her at times, when she little knew of its presence. However, stern though she was, a pattern for less methodical martinets, justice ever held a large share in her actions and judgments. And at this point she arose and went to prepare a meal for the wanderer.

When she had gone, grandfather—who had generally shown me the most consistent kindness of them all—bade me draw nearer to the fire and sit down, saying that I must be tired. Of course I disclaimed any such weakness. Then he asked what the fair was like; I told him, and when the booth-theatre was mentioned he recounted me a story to this effect: In his early manhood he had been a member of a strolling company of players—the real undiluted barn-stormers, no doubt—and in time it came to his turn to have a "benefit night." So far as my memory serves me, the piece was either "Maria Martin, or the Murder in the Red Barn," or "Sweeny Todd, the Barber of Fleet Street." But the interesting

point lay in the fact that he was expected to give a supper to the whole company out of his "benefit." So when the play was over and most of the flaming naphthalms had been put out, he went to the money-taker, and found that the amount due to him was eighteenpence! After a council on ways and means, it was decided that all the "benefit" would rise to was "an Irishman's breakfast," as he termed it—*i. e.* herrings and potatoes—each guest being required to furnish his or her own bread, beer, and whatever else was needed.

At the tail-end of this the old lady entered, chided him for "telling such goings on to such a little ragamuffin," then sent me to the scullery to wash myself, after which I should find my supper "on the kitchen table, waiting." Surreptitiously I first glanced at what had been provided, and would dearly have liked to forego the ordered cleansing till after the staying of my appetite, but dared not. However, I was soon back at the board—shouting "Yes" to a query as to whether I had properly washed or not—and filling myself with crisp oatcakes, thin as a florin, from the rack overhead, and with steaming milk, a liquid food that was natural to me, was always welcome, and of which I had known too little during the past seven or eight months. But it was here, on my first being alone in the house, that I presently remembered sister Mary, grew sad at heart—yet continued to eat—and thought that I should not care to remain long at the house.

Having finished my supper, I went back to the parlour, and was allowed to sit on a high "buffet" in front of the big fire.¹ In the meantime, grandmother (whom I can still see in her crinoline and small poke-bonnet on high days and holy days, when my grandfather, who was a bit of a dandy, wore pegtopped trousers, strapped

¹ Coal could be brought to the door for eight to ten shillings a ton, and wood almost for the asking.

under his "block-fronted" boots, a frilled shirt, and a waistcoat that was spotted with tiny flowers) plied me with questions concerning family matters at Barnsley, my father, myself, etc.; during which I gathered that both she and grandfather were secretly glad at my leaving the Barnsley folk to come to them. Apparently I also fidgeted about so much that he offered me sixpence to sit still and silent for five minutes by the sheep's-head clock in the corner. That was the beginning of a Homeric task. At the end of an hour the coveted coin was still unearned. Try as I would, and I tried hard, very hard—thinking of the fair and the few sixpences that had fallen to me during the past months—I could not refrain from a premature moving of hand or foot, or asking if the time was up. Next came Aunt S—— home from the fair and full of it, till she took the notion of wanting to know every item about my being there. Not until she was sternly driven off by her father could the struggle for the sixpence be resumed. Then, when an hour and a half had gone by, latterly accompanied by much urging to "let the lad go to bed," and such remarks as "he doesn't want it," "he doesn't deserve it," etc., I arose triumphant; and was at once sent upstairs, at the heels of Aunt S——, she having, owing to her persistently putting off the task, still to prepare that little room for me under the rafters. And there trouble began forthwith. During the interval down-stairs she had picked up a smattering of my recent doings; and, as on all such occasions, she immediately began to give me the doubtful benefit of her opinion. Now Aunt S—— had two or three links of affinity with Iago: in particular, she was nothing if not critical (probably my grandam was the same ere age began to dim her natural fires). But, unlike that Venetian master of subtlety, criticism was always on her lips; in addition, she was one of the trenchantly destructive order. So

what but an explosion could happen when her flaming, spluttering torch was applied to my ever-open powder? After some scathing remarks on my deformed sense of respectability, accompanied by the arrogant assurance that I was "a little devil," and was "fast on the high road to the proper place for me," she said, with a sniff that bit into my susceptibilities—

"M'm, and I wonder what on earth you're going to do with yourself when you grow up?—going on as you are!"

"Write books, and put you into one!" said I, in mere temper at the goading.

"You write books! Why, you can't clean your own boots!" was her vinegarish jibe; to which she added, smiling in a scoffing way, "At any rate it's bound to be something idle, whatever you do."

I was then struggling out of my knickerbockers, on a chair by the head of the bed, which she was making, on the same side; and, without looking up at her, I ventured the opinion that she had "no room to call anybody lazy-back, because she was the idlest woman——." "In the village" did not leave the privacy of my thoughts. When I realized what had taken place, I was on the floor; my right ear was ringing a pæan of praise and triumph, but not for me, and that side of my head tingled furiously. At the word "woman," Aunt S——, who was broad, fairly tall, and revelled in health—had "fetched" me a "swinger" with her open hand. I had flung rank, salt words into her deepest wound. This was the great upheaver between her and her mother. I almost think that for the same accusation made in public she would have fired the village. So it is with many of us: truth hurts far more than a lie can. However, there she was, standing over me like an Amazon over a conquered, half-naked pigmy, her pale grey eyes flashing annihilation, and the bedclothes dragged all askew in

her hurry to the attack. Then the battle began. Using a word the meaning of which I did not know, but had heard applied to strifeful women of the vindictive and long-nailed type, I, utterly heedless that Aunt S—— was three times my age and bulk, rolled over, bit out "You galldragon!" got a fierce clench of my hands on her nearest ankle, and gave it such a twist inwards that she yelled in pain. But Aunt S—— was not as the house-keeper at home. There was far too much of the family "bite" in her for the success of my operations.

Hardly was the scream out of her mouth, when down she came on me, her bent knees fouling with my ribs in a manner that makes me wonder why the most of them were not broken. Mercifully for me, the engagement was brief. After a very short rolling struggle for the upper position, she had me at her scant mercy. One knee was on my chest; my ears were securely in her hands, and she was raising my head for a second bump on the floor, when in came her father, his long legs covering the intervening space at little more than a stride. The next thing I knew was that she was going up bodily, and was taking me by the ears along with her. But there was no floor on which to bump my head; my hands were free, the result being that I was also free a moment later. Her after-complaint was that she would "carry that mark to her dying day." Of course there was much "fending and proving" on both sides, and it was well for me that grandfather stood between us. Her three best-recollected aspersions were: I was a little fiend of a spitfire; I should come to a bad end, sure as hens laid eggs; and better folks than me had died with their shoes on. I did not know at the time that the last remark meant hanging.

However, her father hustled her out of the room finally, her hair half-loose, her face shaming any June rose, and she emitting a running fire of threats as to

what would become of me generally, and at her hands particularly, later on. Then I was left, to finish the making of my bed and retire—not at my discretion, but “within five minutes,” or that tall piece of masculine justice would be back to help me into bed. The meaning of this promise I understood well enough to keep the time-stipulation. So it was that, hot, hearing the continuous jar of opposing voices down-stairs, painful, and determinedly rebellious, I climbed into the half-made bed—presently, when the candle was blown out, to think of little sister Mary, and to fall asleep with the intention of going to her grave on the following day. It was only that old idea of brooding in sensitive loneliness—an indication of which was subsequently to be found in a fondness for churchyards as places for quiet reading and contemplation—that was coming to the front, after some months of the turmoil of a boy’s side of town-life. Yet how deep and real that loneliness and those injustices were to me then!—all deepened and made more real by the fact that I was there, where I had last seen Mary, yet should never see her again!

CHAPTER V

Working for an appetite—A strained atmosphere—Doing a “big job”
—Commendation and threepence earned—Mary’s grave—Im-
pressive loneliness—Kittens in grandmother’s bonnet—A feline
“character”—My lord of ninepence at the fair—A new routine—
A great resolve.

UNLIKE my morning appearance at home, which had always been allowed to occur at breakfast-time—providing that I made my entrance after due regard to dress, soap and water—here I had to be in evidence an hour beforehand. At so busy a time of the day, in and about a little farmstead, there were small tasks which I could do; nor was I allowed to linger over them, not that I desired to—unless it were something to which, according to my notions, I had been unfairly driven—or that it ever was my bent to linger over the inevitable. From both sides of the family I had inherited a natural obedience to that old saw, “Work first and play afterwards”—that is, when the work was a piece of regular routine or a new but real necessity. Besides, the homestead that surrendered so largely to the domination of my grandam never was, within my recollection, a place in which to “take it easy” over anything that had to be done. Again, if there had been no tasks for my small hands, it was a house where the idea of physically acquiring an appetite was as deeply rooted as any fanatic’s religious belief. And, as breakfast-time was eight o’clock, without the variation of more than a minute, I was early at work—feeling vengeful towards Aunt S—— and knowing by the glint of her brown-grey eyes and her manner that she would dearly have liked to come to closer

quarters with me. In truth it was a strained atmosphere, and every one appeared to feel it as such; nor did there seem to be any immediate likelihood of matters assuming any pleasanter complexion.

When I had finished my hot milk and home-made brown bread, I began to make a move towards greater freedom, my intention being to go straight to Mary's grave. It never occurred to me to ask leave to go there, nor rarely to go anywhere. But I was baulked by my lynx-eyed aunt. She saw me as I was about to leave the premises, drew grandmother's attention to my movements, and obtained me a prompt order not to go beyond the garden wall until I received permission to do so. As I went past Aunt S—— she muttered, so that only I should hear, that "she would let me see for getting her into hot water," by which I gathered that she had been strongly reprimanded after being driven down-stairs on the previous night. It happened that grandfather was present, and he at once bade me follow him—he had something for me to do, "some work that would prevent Satan from finding mischief for idle hands to do." He led me—rebellion rioting in my heart—into the garden, gave me a small spade and directed that I should dig—"just so deep, so wide, mind the roots and throw the earth well outside"—around the base of a certain apple-tree, which I knew to be productive of about a peck of fruit per year. I began the task, he working a while near by, probably in order "to see how I framed." But labouring about a barren tree was not to be continued without sundry penetrative questions as to the whys and wherefores of it all. Aunt S——, patently delighted at my punishment, had pretty quickly followed us; and stood by, watching me, stripped of my jacket and now interestedly engaged in Adam's native calling; she now and then quizzing me ironically. To my many queries grandfather was returning such replies as would give me some

information without sapping my interest by telling me the exact purpose of the matter.

Presently Aunt S—— interjected satirically, "He'll want to know next how many breaths make an ounce!"

"So he should," said her father; "that's the way to learn." Then to me: "You ask, my lad, whenever you want to know a thing—if you're to know, you will; if you're not, you won't." To her he added sharply, "And get you indoors and put your idle hands to something."

Thus rid of my tormentor, I toiled away till, when noon came along, the task was finished—that is, such a hole had been made around the big old tree that I could rock it slightly by pulling on a low outspreading branch; and into this hole, by the use of a small pail, I had emptied a sort of pit into which sink-water, soapsuds and sour milk were thrown to drain and leave a thick, blackish slime behind. This puddle had nearly filled the hole, which had then been levelled by sprinkling light earth on the foul stagnancy below—the order to me being to add earth daily, in the same way, till all was returned. When I stood back, side by side with the tall old man (he was "like a lath and six feet two in his stocking feet," as I often heard said), he admiring the work and complimenting me, there was in my bosom a pride and a new kind of joy such as it had been rarely the lot of "the little savage" to know. I had discovered quite a fresh source of pleasure, that of doing big things of a constructive nature. For did he not say several times that it was "a big job"? More still, as we went indoors he promised me threepence—not for *what* I had done, *that* was punishment; but "for doing it so well and cheerfully and keeping myself so clean." Truth to tell, the latter accomplishment was solely due to my remembering the fair, to my having no other clothes but what I stood in, and to the fact that grandmother would not have allowed me to leave the premises in stained clothing.

After a good feeding on real Yorkshire pudding (thin and saturated with natural gravy as it dropped from roasting beef, the spit of which I had often been compelled to keep turning for some delinquency), made gravy without measure, plenty of vegetables direct from the garden, and a small portion of beef, I was again moving for that objective which had come into my mind off and on since the early morning. Once more, however, I was detected by Aunt S——; “slinking off,” she termed it splenetically. As before, I was called back, this time to be asked whither I purposed going.

“To Mary’s grave,” I blurted out. “Can’t I go?” It had not been my custom to ask to go to a given place, but to go.

“Certainly. Why didn’t thou ask before?” answered my grandam, whose keen eyes were bent on me kindly.

But this did not prevent Aunt S—— from saying, “What’s the brooding little ass want to go there for? He’s like a graveyard enough now—except when he’s like a devil!”

“Stop thy tongue,” said the old lady peremptorily. Then she told me how to find the grave, gave me an errand to perform on the way and a fixed time at which I was to be back in the house. As I went out I heard her severely reprimanding her daughter for being “so hard on the lad when he wanted to gratify such a praiseworthy feeling.”

Knowing that I had no time for loitering—unless I was to get into more “hot water” before night, and there was the fair to help in keeping me on that straight path to which my erring feet were so unaccustomed—I sped over the hill, delivered my message, and continued on to where “the rude forefathers of the hamlet lay.” Easily I found the grave, as directed, by that simple token at its head, and there all my grief welled up afresh. As I had never felt before and was hardly

ever to feel again, I realized how much I stood alone in the world. The loneliness was so impressive and oppressive that I knelt by the little mound and sobbed in utter abandonment. It may be that childish griefs are soonest over; but I am sure that none other are so real as they are, while they last. Feeling that now, indeed, the great black world lay before me; in no vague sense, I was one who must strike out for himself, with all else against him—to all intents and purposes of self-dependence, and support where possible, a man; that now there was no soft cheek between me and whatever came along—unhappily so, for while I felt the heart-wrench of it all, there was in my subconsciousness some notion of that gentle influence which Mary had been to me, and would have become more and more in later years. Feeling all this, in a way, I tearfully left the scene, to remember it again and again in the future, when thousands of miles lay between it and me—when I should see by the mind's eye that toddling little fair-skinned sister, with her rosy cheeks, blue eyes and light-brown curls (a few shades paler than my own); and realize how imperfect and unfinished are the heart and brain of him into whose life, especially in its impressionable years, there comes no formative touch of the divinity of womankind. To him I say: God help you, for you have need of godly sympathy.

On my way home I took a hurried peep at the fair, which was then only half-alive, and hastened back, thinking what a time I would have with that ninepence, what a doll there would have come out of it for Mary, and feeling that pain still tugging at me in between whiles. But I was to have some pleasure before going there. When I entered the house it was to find everything in a state of turmoil, and Aunt S—the verbally buffeted mark of it all. Briefly, the cat had deposited a litter of four kittens in grandmother's Sunday bonnet; and for her negligence in leaving the bonnet-box lid off my aunt

was getting a full and complete lashing from that remarkably agile tongue of her mother. It was plainly evident from her look at me that it would have given her much satisfaction to have there and then squared the account on my side of the slate. Regardless of this fact, as the old lady went into the scullery with her damaged bonnet, I made a grimace at Aunt S—— and flung an appropriate remark at her. For reply she seized the first thing to hand and threw it at me. This happened to be a clothes-brush; but I ducked in time, and the missile smashed some crockeryware on the dresser. Like a hare before the hound I fled out to find grandfather and help him till tea was ready—hearing, as I went, grandam ascertaining the cause of the clatter, and adding to her lashings in consequence. My chief regret at the time was that Aunt S—— would not be thrashed nor penalized with some “big job,” because she was a woman. The more feline offender got off scot-free. It was a dark tabby favourite of my grandmother’s and had three particular claims to being a “character”: while daily lapping milk from a saucer with a tame rabbit that belonged to Aunt S——, it carried home an average of two wild rabbits a week, and almost as oft as the old lady went to Wakefield—some two miles and a half—it went, too, and waited amongst some trees, a little way from the town, till she returned, then it trotted along behind her all the way home; and if she drove there, it followed and met her somewhere on the road, unless some one had taken the precaution to keep it shut in a room.

At this time I had lost part of that former aloofness which had so often and continuously made me prefer the solitude of the wide common and the pond, the fields and the hedgerows to the company of my kind; in its place there had come some of that inherent characteristic of the Englishman, detachment without isolation. Hence it was in this mood and manner that I went to the fair,

after a private wordy brush with Aunt S—— that had completely overcome my pain of loneliness, and with all the weight of that ninepence pulling at my pocket—for grandfather had given me coppers at the last moment, “so that I should not be changing silver and having hangers-on running after me under the impression that I was rich.” My time was to be “half-past eight sharp; or——” well, the birch was still under the bed. At the fair I, of course, met some of those lords of indifference who, on the previous evening, had spent money in my ignored presence. Now amongst them there were those who stood, with their hands out, in the gutter of Hanking-and-no-pence, while I rode by in the chariot of Fulfilled-desire. Retaliation, that exclamation point in my uncorrected code of ethics, had turned its thumbs down on their appeals; and I rode past, leaving them to be torn by the wild beasts of impossible attainment. But that which drew me most, largely because of grandfather’s “benefit” story and his vivid bits of the life, was the booth-theatre. It also carried my mind back to the first play I ever saw, “Rip Van Winkle,” to which father had taken me some two years before this. When we entered, Rip was giving his gun to the chief of the gnomes in exchange for the keg of schnapps, and every detail of that scene will be in my mind so long as I have a scrap of memory left; yet I have no recollection of any after part of the piece. I had been in no theatre during the interval; so that the play was the thing, indeed, and I paid my threepence for a seat in the gallery and entered, thinking to see something like that weird bit on the Katskill Mountains. What surprise was mine, then, when the curtain went up on a rollicking farce called “Meg’s Diversion, or The Sailor’s Sweet-heart!” Ye high gods of Olympia, what a desecrating fall was this! Had I not been suckled and fed on, crawled and was walking in, the doings of magic fairies,

giants, wonderful gipsy boys, Whittingtons, Crusoes, Robin Hoods, Turpins, noble red men, knights of derring-do, enchanted castles, witches and wizards and all the deeds of great and serious emprise¹ (in the whole of which I still fully believed), and now to come to this buffoonery concerning a sailor, a tinker, a tailor, two elderly caricatures and a hoyden who was prating at almost every entrance and exit—

“Oh, Harry Binnacle, Harry Binnacle,
My hope, my joy, and my topmost pinnacle!”

What knowledge had *I* of love? What conception, even, could I have of that gentle, or ungentle, disturbance and its broad humours? I knew of it only as something very grand, very far away, and stranger than my witches' midnight rides and the magic of my wizards. My superior taste was grievously offended. What the people could see to laugh at surpassed my intelligence. Oh, the lordly wisdom of youth, ignorance and arrogance! In simple truth, the farce was a good one and highly diverting to those persons who had the common-sense to forget their troubles in the amusement it gave them. When the curtain fell, I was about to leave my seat, thinking how foolishly I had spent that threepence; but one of the actors came in front and announced that the next piece would be “Sweeny Todd, the Barber of Fleet Street.” So I sat down again, and great was my later joy at doing so. On my leaving that canvas temple of the sock and buskin, it was with the mighty resolution that *I* would be an actor some fine day. In the “slick” manner in which that barber had cut the throats of his customers there was something that positively fascin-

¹ With the exception of penny periodicals, such as the *Boys of England*, in the school-stories of which I found but little interest—for obvious reasons, perhaps—the above had almost entirely formed my range of reading up to this time; it certainly had been all that my mind had really absorbed.

ated me ; something that outdid all the scalping, lancing, sword-thrusting, battle-axing, bow-shooting and all the other etcetera of killing. It was so simple, so direct, so close at hand and raw, that in future I would be a great throat-slitter, and all my enemies should die by that means. It may be that in spring most young men's fancies turn to love ; but I am sure that in earlier life their thoughts are mainly on the letting of blood.

At any rate, for one hour I had known immense pleasure, the only shortcoming to which was now the reflection that Aunt S—— had not been one of the occupants of Sweeny Todd's chair. And, as it was then nearly eight o'clock, I went home, with fourpence still in my pocket, thinking that an early appearance would help my return on the morrow, and vowing that my acquaintance with theatres should grow at every opportunity, yet never dreaming that I should be a theatre-owner in the following winter. My entrance occasioned such surprise that Aunt S—— immediately volunteered the emphatic opinion that it was due to an empty pocket or to a worse cause. For answer I silently produced my fourpence to the grandfolks, then turned to show it to her, and—as this put my back towards them—I also showed her the greater half of my tongue, which fact she rapped out to her parents, but was—probably for the sake of peace—unheeded. I had expected that my supper would be the usual thing for me there at that time of the year, so it was—frumenty ; but not with the wheat hurriedly boiled and only half-cooked in milk. My grandam's way was to parboil the wheat, then stew it for an hour in the oven ; by which time the grains were so saturated with the milk, and salted to taste, that it became a delicious dish. Over this I recounted to grandfather every detail of "Sweeny Todd." He was much amused, apparently at my delight in the main, and kept the recital going by his encouragement, till Aunt S—— put in—

"Here, you get up-stairs to bed, or you'll be cutting throats all night! And don't you expect *me* to come to you if you shout murder before morning!"

What my reply to her was may be surmised; but she was allowed to have her way in bundling me off to bed.

On the following morning I was again put to work in the garden, yet not as punishment—the idea, as I heard it expressed, being that as my grandparents knew not what to do with me till they heard from my father (who had been written to concerning my arrival from Barnsley), they thought that, as I would not go to school, the best thing was to keep me employed during a part of the day and let me have the remainder for recreation. So came the dinner-hour, after which I was free. That evening my fourpence went in seeing "Maria Martin, or the Murder in the Red Barn," and in a pennyworth of "humbugs" to eat during the piece. This was the end of the fair. The next day brought a letter from my father saying that I could be either sent home, taken home, or kept there; but if I remained, I was to be compelled to go to school, even though I had to be whipped there every morning. From what I heard it was evident that the sympathy of the old folks was with me, except in the matter of schooling, she being very serious on this point, while he laughed and said he would "like to see Joe make the little imp do what he doesn't want to." Without any subtlety or the least consideration for my feelings, Aunt S—— was for taking me home within the hour—she would drive me over, or drive me anywhere else from there, even if she had to borrow a trap or whip for the purpose. Finally it was decided that, unless father changed his housekeeper (naturally I had painted the "motherly person" in something like flaming red on a black ground) I should remain so long as the following routine was maintained in peace: From breakfast to dinner, work in the garden or on the land; dinner to

tea time, do as I pleased; from then to supper schooling under the old folks' supervision.

Routine? Cocklofts and hedgerows! what was routine for but girls, women and those who had to attend to business? My business in life was to come and go as fancy willed. And here all my hours were to be apportioned off, just so-and-so, as though I was a girl or a woman; and me growing up all the time! Work? I did not mind work; I liked digging, weeding, sowing, attending to the cattle and what not; such things gave life an air of responsibility and made me somebody. I could fetch the cows to milk and *try* to milk them; and with the help of Shag, the bob-tailed sheepdog, I could round up the flock and pen them in as well as the next one; and if Shag *did* the most of the work, he wouldn't have done it if I wasn't there to tell him. But schooling! What on earth did I want with any more schooling? Couldn't I read any other boy off his feet and gabble the newspaper over to my short-sighted elders! Couldn't I, didn't I, read everything that came within reach! And what more could any boy be supposed to do? Hadn't I heard time and time again that reading and experience were the great turnpike-road to knowledge? And wasn't I travelling that way?—with the one always in my pocket and the other harvested by a perversity to be ever on the move. For how could one gain experience except by moving and doing things? As for sums and that silly thing they called geography!—what did it matter that I couldn't do a sum in simple multiplication or division to save my head? The world wasn't made of sums, like it was of books. Other folks got on in life without sums; and I shouldn't want sums to help me to make books; and if I didn't do that I would go to sea, and there were no sums on ships; or I would be a farmer—and what had a farmer to do with sums? He only wanted land and sheep and cattle, pigs and poultry and

horses, ducks and fine weather and a man. Geography? that was only a long name which they gave to something that no one was ever expected to understand, except grown-ups. No, schools were for girls, for boys who wished to go to business, and for those who couldn't read or wouldn't take to it properly. I was made for books and the open spaces in life.

Thus I ruminated during the whole of that afternoon, whilst wandering alone in the fields, this news having taken away all desire to seek companions. But then, if I rebelled outright I must go home to the unmotherly care of that "motherly person" and all the more severe "beltings" that she could obtain for me. I could not, would not, return to Barnsley. So that, hemmed in by the threatened routine here, immediate humiliation on one side and continuous punishment on the other, the only outlet before me was—the unknown world. M'm, well, such of it as lay about me during a pilgrimage from place to place, or while living at large from morn to night in the fields, I did not mind. But to go forth into that untried vastness, with only something to read in my pocket and no friendly house when night came down—this gave me pause. The world wanted money for its things, and I had only reading, except——. Yes, I could do some gardening now, gather eggs, feed cows and horses, and with a dog like Shag I could be a great help to a shepherd, and watching sheep would not keep me all the time from my books. That was it: I would bear with this awful infliction of routine until I had learnt a little more of gardening and farming, then—heigh-ho! for the great wide world and the manifold things therein.

CHAPTER VI

Farm-labouring at sixpence a week—"A great reader"—Corrected by superstition—Stealing a march—Premature bitterness—Treachery well-paid—An immense discovery, and a greater fall therein—A case of nettles—Guerrilla warfare—Peace after stress—I return home.

THUS it came about that, so far as my strength would allow, I learnt to make myself generally useful about the place, a fact which gave me an impetus to earn money, and one that was to bear fruit in the near future. My father had agreed to the routine, and had forwarded such school-books as he thought were necessary, along with my clothes from Barnsley. "Figures" were the tall old man's special bent, so that I now picked up a further smattering of arithmetic, history and geography; also, the greatest consideration of all, I received a penny a day for my labour as a farm-hand, together with that of general gardener's assistant. It was owing to this—to being able to return to some of my lost heroes and acquire others, and to accumulate a new set of bows and arrows, pegtops and marbles—that the formerly hated and dreaded routine grew to be quietly tolerated, except now and then when the old Adam of waywardness and disobedience broke out afresh, to the certain sequel of punishment, which rarely came by the way of physical pain. The reason was that grandfather had taken me completely under his management, set Aunt S—— at her proper distance, and generally inflicted any needful chastisement by stopping my afternoon's liberty, and making me work all the day with him, then spend the evening in "lessons." While this form of penalty

failed to raise any devil in me, it was keenly felt, and avoided many a time when a thrashing would have driven me to worse deeds. Apparently to the surprise of every one, I was becoming quite tractable. Then I came in for a little local attention that pleased me considerably. My fame as "a great reader" had gone before me—a great waster of good time, according to Aunt S—, who could see neither use nor beauty in books; and it was about this time that some neighbour lent me, through the agency of one of my grandparents, "The Wide, Wide World." This was followed by "The Old Helmet," "Queechy," "The Lamplighter," "Lena Rivers," "The Basket of Flowers," and other books of their kind, all of which were read with gluttonous absorption, and left on me some impression of their general influence; particularly was this the case with the last but one, in the passionate, resentful and wayward girl heroine of which I did not fail to see what was intended—a female parallel of, and finally a pattern for, myself. But the latter was not to be: the rank soil could not be cleaned up by so short and superficial a raking.

Some two or three weeks after the beginning of this new regime, I learnt two lessons: one of them took immediate effect, while the other was to lie dormant for years. It was during my afternoon's liberty. Three boys from the village and I were bird-nesting. In a hole in the bank of a ditch I found a robin's nest, containing four eggs. According to custom, I took three, leaving the other as a "nest-egg," so that the birds would not desert their home, then sped after my companions. When I blurted out my find on overtaking them, one and all turned upon me with a mouthful of dire calamities which were supposed to happen to the despoiler of a "Bobby's" nest. So impressive, so continuous, and so frightful were their superstitious denunciations that I—in whom there was also a latent strain of superstition—

turned on my heel there and then, restored the eggs to their place, and never afterwards dared to meddle with the home of a robin. Later on we found what we, in our ignorance, thought to be a wood-pigeon's nest; it was at the top of a tall silver birch; the hour was already late, so we decided to meet and essay the venture on a given subsequent afternoon. We parted; and my breast at once became the habitation of an evil genius that was akin to the one which had so troubled poor 'Lena Rivers. I wanted to go back and have the whole of this victory to myself. But the prick of conscience and the pull of time combined in a NO that was too big for me to ignore. On the succeeding afternoon my erring feet would wander to that silver birch. I was like a moth sitting on the flat of a candlestick and looking at the flame above. This was where my weakness lay, in going near that sky-silhouetted piece of temptation. But then my "vaulting ambitions" had always been of a skyward nature, as I was to be told again and again in the galling, biting years to come, when the gaunt face of want should bear me daily company; when the poisonous wormwood of unrequited striving should enter my soul, as I saw shameless blatancy hurrying to undeserved success, and the numskull sons of prominent fathers riding along the sunny road of ease, merely because they were their fathers' sons, with the fool many harnessed willingly to the vehicles of their prosperity; when I learnt to know the stinging power of petty jealousies in little minds that suddenly found themselves face-to-face with something greater than themselves, with the undeniable fact that something good had come out of what was worse than a Nazareth to them; when I became acquainted with the unjustness of the self-appointed judge, the blindness of the self-called prophet, and the wisdom of arrogant ignorance; when my mind went back, with bitter appropriateness, to my granddad's refrain—

“Oh, the days when I was hard up,
In want of food and fire;
When I used to tie my shoes up
With little bits of wire!”

And when I should be stirred to galling tears by the
more pathetic air and words of his old plantation ditty—

“Oh, hard times, hard times
Come again no more!
Many days have you lingered
Around my cabin door;
Oh, hard times, hard times
Come again no more!”

But a truce to this! We are out bird-nesting now, and privation is still many a league on the journey. There I stood, gazing upwards, till the law of attraction became too strong for me to resist. My jacket was off, and that spirit of emulation and “go one better” which my father had always encouraged was pulling me up the smooth trunk of that birch. Oh, but that was a long climb! Twice it seemed that I should have to quit the task. At length, however, the lowest branch was reached, and I rested and looked down the painful way up which I had toiled. Then a glance above—ah, there was the prize!—all for me! I would give the other boys an egg each, I thought—more could not be afforded; and surely they wouldn’t expect more. After all, it was worth the climb. There were no wood-pigeons’ eggs in my collection, and here was a whole nest to myself. I would be able to chop some of them away for other treasures. By this time I breathed more freely, and resumed the upward journey, now made fairly easy by the branches; till presently my hand went over the edge of the nest and came into contact with *a lot of little eggs*. The nest was that of a tree-sparrow, or one had laid its eggs in the discarded nest of a wood-pigeon.

The “little savage” could have howled in chagrin. At first I was for throwing nest and eggs to the ground.

Then came the idea to leave it, and let one of the other boys—they were all bigger than I—have the same tremendous climb. But for some reason, now unknown, I put all the eggs but one into my cap, took the edges of the cap between my teeth—as was our common custom—and went sorrowfully downwards. Ten minutes after leaving the tree there was a whir of wings on the other side of a bush around which I was blundering, and very soon I had discovered a partridge's nest, with such an abundance of eggs at the bottom that I could now have shouted with joy. But the wood was a small one, and there might be some one about. Having gazed my avaricious fill, like a miser over newly-found gold, or a lover at the face of his sleeping mistress, I was thinking of fetching something in which to carry the eggs home, when the crackling of twigs disturbed me. I crept under the bush, waited, listened, and thought of putting my ear to the ground, as I had read of braves and scouts doing. Then well-known voices reached me, and I stole out, to peep around the bush and watch the new-comers. They were two of my companions on the previous day, and were making for the silver birch. I let them get there, and the bigger boy of the two begin to climb up. Then, so eager was I to show them that I was aware of what they were doing, I ran to them, and scornfully intimated that they need not make the climb—I had already been up, and this (opening my cap) was what I found! Here I saw the jackass-part I was playing, blushed at my blundering, and instantly, to hide it all, told them of the new discovery. This they flouted. What! such a find as a partridge's nest with "about twenty eggs in it"? Such was their flagrant, biting disbelief that I at once challenged them to "come and see." We went. They saw, and the partition was great. Not even a nest-egg was left. My share, being that of the discoverer, was the only perfect number, seven; and home I struck with them in my cap. Grandfather was

in the paddock as I went through, *en route* for the thatched toolshed where my string of eggs hung in decorating festoons. He asked what I had. In pride and glee I opened my cap under his far-away face. With a jerk the tall body bent. His head was on a level with mine. Then said he, sharp and short—

“Where did you get ’em?”

“In the plantation there,” I replied, my jubilation suddenly giving way to an instinctive suspicion of pain.

“Then bring ’em back—you little devil of mischief!”

And he had me by an ear, painfully lightening my step on that side, and making me hurry along to keep pace with his long, quick strides as he made for the little wood—saying, with such plain meaning, how he would teach me to run the risk of a five-pound fine or three months in Wakefield gaol. At this I quaked more than ever, and blurted out that I did not know it was wrong, did not think it was, etc., etc. Yet over every yard of the way he maintained that terrible pinch on my ear, he muttering from time to time how neighbour Rycroft would like to know of this. In the midst of my torment I remembered that the plantation was in the unfriendly farmer’s hiring, and in later times I understood what he would have made out of this law-breaking. When the eggs had been quickly and carefully deposited in the nest, while the hen-bird carried on her lamentations close by, and we had as speedily passed out of the wood again, I received a sound box on the unwrenched ear and a stern order to “get indoors.” No further questions were asked, nor was any information volunteered. I did as bidden, and the evening was unduly long, sad, and full of lessons. I afterwards learnt that on their way home the other boys met an older one, who, on seeing their eggs, told them of the enormity of their trespass; whereon the eggs were immediately broken and all traces hidden.

In this manner largely some two weeks passed away. Then came a short period that was irregularly yet frequently enlivened by guerrilla warfare between Aunt S—— and me, she being sometimes the victor by sheer force of strength, while I now and then compelled capitulation or scored a point by the means of artifice. Owing to these "differences," the peace of the house was continually set at naught; for which reason she received much upbraiding, and I became the subject of a larger amount of undesired attention that consisted of unnerving prophesies anent my future and probable end in this life, threats to take me home, and promises of condign punishment—more of which would doubtless have been carried out, had not the old folks seen that Aunt S—— was so largely to blame for continuing the hurly-burly.

During this time several small landmarks were put up by the wayside of my life. The first was a very painful one, and happened in this manner. Aunt S——, while her mother had gone to Wakefield, borrowed me from grandfather for the purpose of gathering spring nettles to put into the mutton broth. Off I went with a basket, a pair of old scissors, and a glove for my left hand; the rapped-out order being, "Be back in twenty minutes, or——." Deaf to and heedless of that subjunctive conclusion, I swung out of the house, into the meadow, and made for where I knew of a fine bank of nettles, where I could get what I wanted in a few minutes, and spend the remainder of those twenty in possibly finding a nest. But luck was not with me on that genial forenoon. My way took me down by the sheep-wash. Some hilarious voices, and presently a lot of splashing, drew me nearer. Again I was the moth, my candle being a bathe. Some boys from the village had dammed up the wash with stones and sods, and—well, such was the water to me that I recollect a party of us, when I was about the age

of ten, breaking away thick ice for the purpose of having a bathe in another sheep-wash, and bathe we did. Briefly, the errand was so far forgotten in part, and in part ignored, that I was soon as furious an amphibian as any boy there. How long this went on cannot be said; but the interruption was cruel as it was sudden. I was wantonly disporting my glories along the stone edge of our great bath, whilst beauteous sunlight made the landscape gay, and the welkin rang with our unconsidered merriment, when Aunt S——, out on a hurried and vengeful hunt for me, appeared like a Medusa in the gateway of the fold that was built around the wash. A fury to the fray, on she came without a pause. Into the water I went with such haste that I bodily fouled with the head and shoulders of another boy, and down we both went, spluttering and gurgling as we disappeared. When I came up again and had cleared eyes and mouth, it was to see Aunt S—— stalking from the fold with all my clothes under her arm. Scrambling wildly out of the water, and inviting all and sundry to join me in a forage for my garments, I made after her on hasty tiptoe, thinking to overtake her silently and snatch the clothes away. In this I was well supported by four or five others. But Aunt S—— was not to be sneered at as a foewoman. Either feeling our presence instinctively or knowing it intuitively, about she spun, made a grab at me—who, as the leader of the expedition, was in the van—missed, but left her finger-marks on my wet shoulder as I slipped away. Then, like a thrasher's flail, rose and fell and swung around the braces on my knickerbockers, to the accompaniment of howls of pain, and the panic-stricken fleeing of naked boys. One could have quothed, with old Kaspar, it was an Amazonian victory. Then after me the conquersess came. I doubled. She threw a too handy and a too well-aimed clump of earth at me; and while I paused to exclaim at the pain and the unfairness

of such tactics, she charged again, and pushed me headlong into a bed of rank nettles.

To do Aunt S—— justice, I do not believe that she would have done this barbarous piece of business if she had paused a moment to think of what she was doing. As it was—well, there were no nettles in the broth on that day; and the broth, the mutton, and all else in connection were of so indifferent a quality that grandfather made certain emphatic remarks. Whether it was in her heart or not, contrition was on her tongue from the instant I fell backwards and rolled over to get out the torment. In short, when grandmother returned about tea-time, she found me in bed, swathed in old linen and anointed almost from toe to crown with hog's-lard, which, as a cooling application, Aunt S—— had used because the next obtainable article, salad oil, was too expensive. This caused a resumption of our former armed neutrality, honours, according to grandfather, being equal in the matter of blame; but, to my hedgerow and wayside notions, there could be no equality where pain was so grossly uneven. Hence I was for ever casting about me for a more satisfactory equalizing of things. And the more the white hen of my machinations laid its egg elsewhere, then came home to roost, the more I strove to make it lay at home, and roost on the peace of my generally unrelenting enemy. One of the outcomes of this was another victory to her. I had been making matters as awkward as I could for her in and about the rear of the house during her absence from the scene; and having set a trap—a small tin pan of water so tilted on the top of the dairy door that when she entered the contents would fall on her—I went off to re-examine my birds' eggs in the toolshed. A few minutes later I made for a trapeze, which I had constructed out of some old rope and the broken handle of a hoe, under one of the boughs of my old friend the

barren apple-tree. And as there was still much of that black slime in the wide hole around the base—grandfather having changed his original order, and added to the puddle by emptying another sink—I had to be rather careful, because my swinging perch was half-over the hole. But it is not given to man to lay his plans so as to thwart the possible turns of a feminine enemy (perhaps that is why Fortune is personified by a dame). What, then, may a poor boy do? After a few evolutions, which were due entirely to the pressure of animal spirits, and to the thought of how that cold drench would pull Aunt S—— up in the dairy doorway, I was sitting carelessly on the bar, wondering if I dare purloin a few eggs from a “featherpoke’s” nest which grandam knew of at the top of the orchard—when whack on my back came a flat something (it subsequently proved to be a thick lath from the bottom of a window-blind) and out of the trapeze I fell. Instinctively I struggled to keep out of that puddle, but lost my balance and went into the mess up to my waist. Hardly was I into the slough of punishment, when Aunt S——, who had stolen upon me in this unfair manner, fled to the rear of the house—showing that, although her head and shoulders had missed the water in my trap, some of it had run down her back. What I considered to be the worst part of this affair was her callous and dishonest forswearing. When I appeared on the scene, bursting with accusation, taunt and torment—to be there and then ordered under the pump by grandmother, and cleansed somewhat by running water and the yard-broom before being allowed to enter the house—her only reply was that she knew nothing of the matter. Say what I would, accuse her as I did, call her a liar, as was my due, if not my place, and presently became my achievement, she persisted that I was “only trying to drag her into the trouble.” But out of her own mouth she convicted

herself. The quietude of her bearing, particularly when "liar" leapt forth, in contrast to her habit of "flaring up" at small things, convinced the old lady that I was not wholly guilty; hence I received no further punishment on that occasion.

Shortly after the foregone affair, and still owing to more or less surreptitious tyranny on the part of Aunt S——, I hired myself out to a small farmer, a mile and a half away, to tend cattle on a common and by the roadside at threepence a day. The hours were nine to six; and by stealing off immediately after breakfast, with some purloined food in my pocket, I arrived in time on the initial morning. On returning home, all questions were answered by saying I had been "rambling about." As to the shirked forenoon duties there—my offer to do them at once was refused, and I was bidden to tea, then commanded to lessons. When I reappeared on the following evening, it was to be received with threats of dire happenings if such a thing occurred again; and again came the order of tea and lessons, the latter being prolonged as punishment. Next day I was late in getting away, but went, and did not return till darkness was setting in. To my surprise, no unkind word was said to me. On the contrary, I was at once given my supper of frumenty, yet around me generally there was an ominous quietude, the meaning of which I ought to have understood to some extent. Then the awakening came. Half-an-hour after the meal, I had been soundly thrashed by grandfather, and sent to bed in the dark; he having needlessly informed me, in short snatches during that painful operation, that he would "let me see what it meant to leave work at home to go and work elsewhere." In plain words, as I subsequently discovered, Aunt S—— had spent the afternoon in scouring around for information concerning me, and had been far too successful for my liking. During the two following days close con-

finement was rigorously adhered to, and all arrears of lessons had to be worked up. My three days' wages were also drawn and confiscated as an additional penalty. On regaining my freedom, it was to find that a week had to go by ere I was allowed out of the ken of one body or another, during which time work and lessons were continuous; but the worst of it all was my being deprived of general reading.

So much for rebellion under that regime. But all things have their day, and a temporary end to this unhappy period came with the departure of Aunt S—— on a lengthy visit to another aunt, whom I saw so seldomly that I fail to remember her clearly. This brief time of joyousness began early on the morning after Aunt S—— went away. Grandmother called me to lace up her stays; and I wanted to know all about why the lacing was not done in front, so that the wearer could do it, instead of behind. In the generally bustling about that followed I was her right hand; we worked together with ease and comfort, and much later commendation to me. So smoothly had the day passed that when tea-time came the old lady made a "bak'stone"¹ cake as a reward for my cheerful industry during the whole day. Further still, lessons were curtailed that evening. Thus the week went by, and half of that confiscated ninepence was given to me. On a wet day in the following week—at the end of which I received the other fourpence halfpenny—I found a new interest in the world of reading. Grandmother began that feminine pastime known as "turning out drawers," and this led to some old boxes and trunks being served in the same manner. Here I was a willing volunteer, for many and rare—to me—

¹ This was a foot to fifteen inches in diameter, and about half-an-inch thick. It was made of white flour, "shortening" *ad lib.*, was sweetened, and sometimes had currants in. After being baked brown on a stone over the fire, it was cut through the middle, buttered, and served hot.

were the articles to be seen. One of the first things to attract attention was "The Life and History of Jimmy Hirst of Rawcliffe," with a pictorial cover representing a nondescriptly attired man sitting on a saddled bull. This absorbed me so completely that I quickly picked out the salient points of Jimmy's wonderful life. Right away I would ride a bull to hounds—some day—teach a pig to point game, and build a carriage that would measure the miles and take me to London to see the Queen. All this I rattled off while helping the old lady here and there, she telling me kindly that it was "all crazy humbug," and that "there was already too much of the sort in that little noddle of mine." But, as no real check was offered, I was happy in my imaginings. Then "Bamfylde Moore Carew, King of the Gipsies," appeared. A few minutes of reading showed me, however, that he could not hold up his head by the side of that marvellous gipsy boy of the green covers and the lace-slashed coat; so he was dropped, and I went into the rummaging with renewed avidity—it was my first experience of a literary hunt for the curious and the old amongst the flotsam and jetsam of bygone print, and was many a time to be remembered in after years amid the dust and pathos of second-hand bookshops. The next find was a bundle of broadsheet songs, mostly Irish, and old ballads. This really constituted the treasure of the day; and when grandmother saw what joy I found in "Bold Brennan of the Moor," "The Croppy Boy," "Lord Bacon," "The Blackbird's Lament," and dozens of verse-stories of the same school, she promised to repeat me some others that evening—if I continued "to behave" myself. From this point till the work of the day was done, and we three were gathered by the high, bright, steel fender, I was an incarnation of docility, attention and solicitous eagerness. While I sat on a "buffet" by her side and she knitted, she told me the long ballad of

"Bretton Hall"—how a scion of the Fitzwilliam family left Bretton, which was only a few miles from there, spent twenty-two years in searching for the world's end, then returned, to find that his wife had just been re-married. Later on she sang me "Lord Bacon was a Noble Lord," some snatches of which I had often heard from her lips; then, regardless of grandfather smilingly reminding her that she was "only stuffing his wild young head with more nonsense," I was treated to "The Ballad of the Murdered Postboy," and immediately afterwards learnt that the crime took place within some two miles of my proper home, and that the body of the victim was buried in Normanton churchyard. From that moment Normanton had a new interest in my eyes, an interest which places less favoured of sanguinariness could not have. For me there had not been—and were not to be—such playmates, home-life and toys as fell to the lot of average children in the same walk of life. To me there were no flowers of the field, nor any of the garden, except as splashes of colour, perhaps because I had never possessed the sense of smell. Orchards and vegetable gardens I understood—they produced food; flower gardens were merely a source of toil and trouble; trees and hedges were but places for birds' nests and shelters from wind and sun; fields and commons, lanes, woods and highways were just separate expressions of the spirit of liberty. But the riotings of imagination were all mine—to me a story, whether in verse or prose (in verse preferably, because two or three readings or hearings were enough to fix every line in my memory), was an enacted piece of life far more vivid than the life around me; every imagined person *lived*, and every act of his or hers—his mostly; the feminine had no attraction then—was graven on the unfading tablets of my mind. And, alas! that I was so soon to return to that life of the hedgerow and the people of my books and brain.

Shortly after this evening Aunt S—— came home; and on the night of the day of her arrival she burnt my frumenty—in spite and carelessness, I was sure—then insisted that I should eat it, or go to bed without supper. This was unknown to grandmother, who was growing more and more accustomed to leave much to her youngest daughter, and in whose heart the erstwhile searching fire of life was lowering. The spirit of devilry was back in my brief Eden, perhaps all the more virulent because of its recent rest. I retired—empty of supper, but full of intended vengeance. And, all too truly, the morning saw me hard at work. From the very first things went awry between Aunt S—— and me. Then the *ultima thule* was reached by a smart slap on the ear that sent me spinning; but in an instant I was back at the fray with a handy stick, kept for stirring pigs' potatoes when boiling in the copper. With this I might have done her some real bodily harm, had not grandfather stalked on to the scene at her first shout of pain.

"He's the incarnation of discord, the little limb of Satan! And there's never peace when he's about the place!" I heard her exclaim in self-justification to her father, as I left the rear of the house; and often since then I have looked back to that expression and the occasion as evidence of certain women's sense of justice. An hour later I was impulsively plodding my way back to Normanton, my jacket-pockets full of food, and my aching heart fuller of bitter rebellion, humiliation at having to return home, and a feeling—not unaccompanied by tears—that there was no bright spot in the world for me. But the worst of it all was leaving the grave of Mary; yet I had with me the old brown-lustre mug out of which she used to drink milk. This was said to have voluntarily fallen from the dresser and broken, some two hours before she died, and was afterwards pieced together by grandmother.

CHAPTER VII

A new regime—Finding a former friend—Gruesome touches—Bonfires of note—A cracker, animosity and pain—Miniature theatricals—I turn showman—The last of an enemy—A new friend and a period of peace—More experiences of the drama—Love-letter-writer extraordinary—The horrors of strikes.

My advent at home was taken quite as a matter of course. The housekeeper was merciful enough to take small notice of me—at the outset, that is. Hence for a while there was peace, during which time my clothes and school-books were brought home by grandmother, who did not forget the broadsheets, ballads, etc., which she had given to me. For a good hour or more she and my father were closeted in private, and I was undoubtedly the subject of their conversation. When she left us there was a certain motherliness underlying her serious and rather stern exhortation to me to “be a good lad.” It was the first and the last time that I could clearly remember her kissing me. What she had said to my father I never knew; but for some two or three weeks after her visit he seemed to pay me unusually kind attentions. I was partially rigged out afresh in clothing. My name was put down at the village bookshop and newsagent’s as good for ninepence a week, and I became the glorified possessor of a new cricket bat. There was no wonder that I went to Normanton school in comparative peace for a while, excepting the usual fights without and canings within. Another influence in the right direction was the discovery, at the Church Sunday school, of my Whitwood teacher. Innocently enough I wanted to know why she did not teach in the day-school; had she done so, I should probably have been saved an

immeasurable amount of subsequent pain and trouble. Her reply was that she then had a husband and did not have to work. What marriage had to do with the matter was a puzzle to me; and why a young woman, so pretty and so good, wanted to marry, when she could teach lessons in school, was still harder to understand. However, while she remained there, which was only till winter came, the large number of little tickets that I earned was proof of my attendance being regular and my behaviour exemplary—for me.

One of the first things to which I paid close attention immediately after my return home was grandmother's story of the murdered letter-carrier. Having found his gravestone close to the east end of the church, I religiously followed his footsteps to where—at the entrance to the village of Snydale—he was said to have had his throat cut and thrown into a ditch to die; then on to the inn, to which he subsequently crawled on his hands and knees, and where, according to the ballad, he, being unable to speak, wrote on a slate an account of the deed and some description of his murderer, then died with the blood-stained slate in his hands. For me this matter had a curious interest that bordered on fascination; not that I *revelled* in the thought of blood or the killing of my fellow-mortals. The holding tentacles were a story and a strong touch of the element of strangeness. It was the same when I discovered, on the north side of the churchyard, a stone erected to one who "was drowned at sea," and another to a person "who died a violent death," though what the latter end was I could not learn. By the side of these three all the other "pale inhabitants below" were as nothing. At the graves of the first and last I would stand like one transfixed, reading the inscriptions, seeing the murder of the postboy and imagining all sorts of violent deaths for the other poor soul who had gone untimely thence. It was in the same spirit that

I set out one Saturday, with a meal in my pocket, on a four-mile journey to Featherstone in order to see where a dead man hung a living one over the churchyard wall. This was a story that had been repeated to me by my father, when I told him of the postboy affair. Briefly, it was as follows: A farmer, returning late from Pontefract market, was killed and robbed by a footpad; who then secured the body on his back by the means of the farmer's belt and his own, his intention being, apparently, to throw it into a deep pond on the opposite side of the village. But when he reached the churchyard, the low, stone wall of which flanked the roadside, he paused to rest his burden on the sloping top of the wall; then, as he was lifting the bight of the belts over his head, to enable him to stand upright—as was afterwards supposed—the body slipped over the wall, causing the belts to take him across the throat, with the narrow top of the wall at the back of his neck. At any rate, the two bodies were found in that position on the following morning, while the farmer's money and watch were in the pockets of the footpad.

In this manner largely the remainder of that summer went by; but before the leaves had all finished falling I was back at irregular fits of my old ways—driven there, it must honestly be said, by the reviving animosity of the housekeeper. So far, however, the attacks were spasmodic and rather mild; therefore the punishments were not very heavy. So came Guy Fawkes' Day, and with it the beginning of worse times. As to the bonfires of then and now: we—and most villages were the same—counted no fire complete unless it had two to three tons of coal, four to five large cartloads of wood, and a tree-trunk to set up in the middle as "king." By the opening of September the boys organized themselves into gangs, the big ones scouring the locality for fallen boughs and decayed trees, while the smaller boys went from house

to house begging coal—the rule of the little mendicants being that each house should give a pailful or suffer the stealing of two. (On one occasion a miner's wife unknowingly locked me in her coalshed during this operation; but, as the place was built of loose stone slabs, laid horizontally on each other, I, with the help of a confederate outside, succeeded in breaking through the rear wall of my prison and escaping. Through that same hole we took two extra pailfuls of coal, as penalty for refusing the time-honoured custom and for imprisoning the accredited collector of the dues.) By this means we were supposed to gather in some two tons; another ton was given by the managers of the mines. At Normanton there were practically two villages, the old and the new, with probably fifteen hundred inhabitants in the former and two thousand in the latter. So that there were always two rival bonfires; and as Love Lane formed a short and handy channel between the two storage grounds, purloinings and reprisals became pretty common as the fifth of November drew near. But the whole of this business was far from being a boys' affair; youths and young men from the mines and the ironworks were the dominating spirits both in organization and in labour. And many a real sanguinary struggle occurred between the rival factions during efforts to carry off each other's timber. In fact, these marauds and seizures led to the instituting of night-watchers with, in our case, a bulldog to guard the fire materials. Then came the night of the fourth, known thereabouts as "Mischief Night" or the beginning of "Liberty Day"; the popular idea being—in young minds, at any rate—that the "bonfire gatherers" were legitimately at liberty to carry away anything they "found loose," *i. e.* discarded and decaying. On the great day itself half-a-dozen men, who happened to be on the afternoon "shift" at work, dug a deep hole in the ground, set up the "king"—with a

guy on the top made of squibs and crackers, generally contributed—and arranged timber, coal, tar-barrels, straw, etc., so that a person could walk in and set light to the heart of the mass. This last act was an honour, and was usually done at dusk by some prominent inhabitant, to the accompaniment of a mighty hissing, cracking and booming from fireworks, rifles and boys' cannon; it being the custom of the local Volunteers to assemble and fire volleys of blank cartridge now and then. As for our cannon, these were not the toy brasses that one sees now-a-days; but old "horse" pistols, pieces of plugged iron-piping and the like secured to blocks of wood, which were chained to stakes, and fired by trains of powder. Of course the explosive was very easy for us to get. That very year I had six large ginger-beer bottles full of blasting powder, bought in small quantities from a miner here or there, and stored secretly in the cellar. That year also my big gaspipe cannon—which I had made at such infinite pains of secret plugging, hammering, filing and leading, all with an inherent delight in building up a big thing—burst early in the evening, happily around the corner of a wall, and left only the chained block for me to lament over. However, as no other equally big roarer was to be had at short notice, I quickly sold my store of powder or exchanged it for fireworks and bought more with the monetary proceeds—except one bottleful, which I wanted to throw into the heart of the fire, but was stopped by some man who properly threatened to "fling me in after it if I did such a mad thing." As for the roasting of potatoes and chestnuts on stray logs raked aside for that purpose; the cans of hot coffee and "parkin" (a sticky kind of dark gingerbread about an inch thick—a cake that was native to the occasion); the "humbugs" and other sweetmeats; and the ale, currant loaf and cheese amongst the men and women—these were going all the time till near midnight. And when

the guy on the top of the "king" became ignited, the whole place roared with wild hurrahs and the fizzling and popping of powder. Sometimes the local brass band would also attend the function. There was nothing new in a fire lasting well into the second night; on that particular year it was replenished on the second evening and was burning on the following one.

And here happened my unfortunate piece of back-sliding. The fire was so short a distance from my home that the housekeeper was able to procure me an early command indoors; so early that I still had many squibs and crackers left. With these I went to the usual after-math on the succeeding evening. By-and-by she came and stood a while watching the fun, as many other persons did. Then, in retaliation for her "interference" on the night before, I crept up behind her and tied a cracker to the bottom of her skirt. Unluckily she turned in time to see me light the thing. It jumped and did its proper business. She jumped too, in a way; then ran and doubled and ran again and shrieked every time the thing cracked. Meanwhile I dodged and hid from point to point and was happy—I was a cannibal-brave watching my victim screaming up and down in front of the fire that was to cook her. Some bystanders admonished her to stand still, others made futile grabs at the erratic cracker. Then, to my real dismay, her skirt took light. But within a minute it was put out; and she was on the ground in a faint—or appearing to be so—while two or three persons were scurrying off for brandy. In that hour—in that act, I should say, our neutral peace gave up its feeble ghost; it died on the pyre of a halfpenny cracker and the burnt hem of a faded black frock, fanned by the spiteful wind of inherent animosity and insulted dignity. Of the "horrors" of the occasion and her "marvellous escape" she never tired of talking, so long as I afterwards knew her. As to what

immediately followed—I would not care to dwell on *that*. Enough, it was past midnight when my physical pain eased enough to allow sleep to come to my tear-swollen eyes. From that day for many weeks I was as one who had no *home* and bitterly felt the deprivation—only a place in which to sleep, have *some* food and be miserable. Ah, we trod the years together, those little griefs and I; but how intense, how real, how great they were to me then! And, though small my thought that greater griefs could be, we should tread the years together—those larger pains and I; when the gall had sunk deeper and there could be no after-time of youth to draw the poison out and leave the wound to heal in healthy state.

The school-money had to be taken every Monday morning, and I regularly took it, then as regularly played truant from noon on that day to the end of the week. My good angel of the Sunday school was gone. Friend or proper influence I had none. The field was my friend, a shed or barn my shelter in rain, solitude my companion, while reading was my means of forgetting all unhappy things. Did I repent what had brought me to this? Honestly, I do not think I did. That was a point of view which I appeared to be incapable of acquiring. To my certain knowledge, it was said of me that I was doubly deficient—physically in the matter of smell, and mentally on the point of penitence. But then, perhaps those persons who tiresomely repeated this opinion were blaming me for being, mentally, no better than they were.

However, delinquencies and whippings now followed each other with quite respectable methodicalness. Nor were many of the punishments for truancy. Those were not the days of attendance officers for elementary schools. Thus it was only in an occasional haphazard way that my father heard of this disobedience. He had merely drifted back to his old ways, and I had done the same.

Nay, I am fain to believe that he had again looked on me as quite hopeless in the aggregate, and was but leaving me to develop in my own way. And, indeed, if that was his view, small blame to him therein. It was about this time that I remember a neighbour and fellow-worker of his, named Naughton, saying to him: "For every devil you thrash out you'll thrash twenty in." Instinctively that remark made me look on the speaker as a friend, and the following summer was to see me do a strange service to his two children. Then Christmas began to loom up. The usual games and pastimes were put into preparation, such as "Morris Dancers," "The Old Horse," "Death and the Lady," "The Peace Egg," "The Old Tup" and mumming. And I, being small for my age, was cast for the part of Devil-doubt in "The Peace Egg," almost every line in the eight parts of which I still remember, but never learnt the meaning of the title. Thus tricked out to represent the Puritan idea of the Prince of Evil—in tight-fitting black glaze from top to toe, with a curved and spear-pointed tail, a small besom, and a box strapped across the back of my shoulders for the money—at the end of our little play I walked in and out amongst the spectators, repeating, whilst they dropped coppers and small silver pieces into my box—

"Here come I, little Devil-doubt;
If you don't give me money I'll sweep you all out.
Money I want, money I crave;
If you don't give me money I'll sweep you to your grave."

When we performed in the streets and yards during daylight little crowds would gather around us; and such respect was paid to the custom that hardly ever was a door closed against us after nightfall. At the end of the "season"—*i. e.* from Christmas Eve to late on New Year's Eve—my share of the collections was eight shillings odd, and, as I had been behaving myself somewhat

during a few weeks before Christmas, I was allowed to spend the money in my own way. This was in the purchase of a miniature theatre—that is, a collapsible wood and cardboard proscenium to stand on a table, pictorial representations of characters fixed on bits of wood and with string attached to draw them to and fro on the stage, wings, flies, scenery and set pieces to be mounted and coloured (wherein I again found the joy of construction), and books of short plays. The one particular drama that I recollect was “The Miller and His Men,” who were millers by day and robbers by night. So far as my memory serves me I favoured bandit and piratical plays of the direct action type. An old sheet, with a piece cut out to fit around the proscenium and hung above, served as a screen for the operator to work behind; and two candles on the table did duty for footlights. At first it was my habit to have a light at the back of the screen, but, finding that this dwarfed the realism of the thing, I committed the whole of each play to memory and did away with the light. My entertainments were twice a week and always in the evening—one mid-week performance when the entrance fees were either halfpennies or marbles, pegtops or anything that I could afterwards sell or swap away, mostly in kind rather than in coin; and one Saturday-night show, when I would not accept anything less than ha’p’nies for back seats and pennies for front ones. After some two months of hard wear my characters and accessories became dilapidated and refused to work at times. On such occasions I would move the footlights, mount the table and mouth the remainder of the play in full declamatory style and sing-song intonation. The money that I made by this means went as all my surplus wealth did at that time and in subsequent years—ay, and, in later times still, when it was not surplus and should have gone in food and clothing—*i. e.* in reading matter.

But I am before my story. Ere this happy condition of things came about I had seen the last of my enemy of the black, burnt frock and the pale, flabby face with its little, dark eyes and its ever ready but meaningless smile. This was how it happened. Towards the end of the previous summer my father—who never did things by halves nor had ever been a drinker—became a non-smoker and a total abstainer. So fervid and sincere was he on these points that he forbade any intoxicant to be brought into the house by any one. Further still, he put “Buy Your Own Cherries” into my hand, told me to read it, and afterwards so questioned and talked to me about it that the whole story and its moral sank into my mind with a lasting impression. Then, during the first week of the new year, I went home—from school on this occasion—with a couple of companions who were older than I. The housekeeper was out; and in foraging about for something in the shape of a meal I came across an old teapot in a corner of the cupboard and found it contained liquid, but the spout was corked up. Under the impression that the contents was tea, I poured some into a cup, saw that it was colourless, showed it to one of the others, and was informed that I had discovered—gin. When at last I believed my informants I would have given them my share of “The Peace Egg” money, so great was my jubilation. For had I not seen that same teapot on the table when the housekeeper had been entertaining certain of her cronies! It was a time to shout “Eureka”! But the word was unknown to me; so I yelled something else, poured the gin back, replaced the cork, and put the teapot into the cupboard. That evening the enemy opened war on me in her usual form—complaints, the greater half of which were lies. And seeing that my father was becoming severe in words and manner, I went straight to the cupboard, brought the teapot to him and said, “That’s got her gin in it;” then

turned to look defiance at my tormentor. I shall never forget the expression on her face; it has often made me think that the simulated hatred of the actor, no matter how gifted he or she may be, cannot put on a tenth of the intensity of the real. Imitation of other passions may stalk masterly and convincingly in the place of reality; but hatred must have fact as its basis. That scene was short, sharp and sufficient; in it I saw my paternal grandmother to the full, as I knew her at the beginning of recollection. From that moment the house-keeper's power to do me harm was dead. At the end of the week her disobedience to orders—that "primal eldest sin"—sent her forth from the hell she had caused so often, and left me to enjoy an Eden in comparison. A big, strong servant girl, with a heart like gold and a head like wood, took her place forthwith, and we were a fairly contented trio. Betsy, as she was called, was always my pleased and admiring doorkeeper, money-taker and general super at the theatrical entertainments. And if any of the audience made themselves objectionable—especially when I put on stale plays, and there were derisive calls for something new or money back—who so quick to gain me silence and respect as Betsy?—even to the extent of turning out the breaker of our peace, till a more than usually rebellious one broke the windows in protest, and father made me pay for a new pane out of the "theatre money." My only theatrical lease was a repairing one, as I found on several occasions, on some of which Betsy, out of the fulness of her heart and the scantiness of her pocket, desired to contribute a share. To her I was always either "a fair¹ marvel" or "the champion." Let a scrimmage happen to me within her ken, and she would walk through the male-factors like a virtuous Amazonian brave through a parcel of pigmies. Where the gin-drinker had made me bad

¹ Great or unusual.

by representing me to be worse than I was, Betsy helped me along the road by screening my peccadilloes. Between the departed devil, metaphorically, and the deep sea that remained, it appeared as if I should be wrecked utterly. It was in this connection that my father once said to his friend Naughton: "Put him on the road to heaven and he'll make it one to hell; put him on the road to hell and he'll run there. What to do with him I don't know, unless it is to let him run the racket out, then see." The basic fact of the trouble, with me, was that I did not know when to lead trumps; and this mental deficiency, which is so aptly characterized by the racial proverb concerning "number one," remained in its undeveloped state till long after I had trodden the vinegar press of foiled struggle and unrequited effort.

Still we wore along together, and I continued to put in irregular appearances at Normanton school, of which my father heard at times, singly rather than in the bulk, and as often visited with that chastisement which had then become constitutional. Then a great booth-theatre came to the place and pitched on the fair-field down by the ironworks. It remained with us some four weeks, giving a new bill nearly every night; and it put me to sore straits to raise money. To this end I tried to bribe the newsagent into allowing me to have sixpennyworth of periodicals and threepence, instead of the ninepennyworth which I could have every week. But he was an Andrew Marvell in his way. As a result of this failure I went to a small farmer at the old end of the village and secured temporary employment in tending cattle and picking stones off grass-land at threepence a day; instead of whiling away my days in the fields and about the lanes, reading whatever I could lay hands on and imagining myself an outlaw, an Ishmaelite, and everything else of the kind. By this means I saw such plays as "Conn the Shaughraun," "The Orange Girl," "The Green Bushes of the Far West," "Marco the Brigand,"

"The Dog of Montargis," "Ingomar," and "Cartouche, or the French Jack Sheppard," along with much less appreciated and probably more mutilated renderings from Shakespeare; the drawback to it all being that, as I had to be indoors by half-past nine, I lost the last three-quarters of an hour of each play, except on Saturday nights, when my father took me to the theatre. My other visits there were, of course, unknown to him. But at the beginning of the second week the farmer would have no more of me. His farmstead was not far from the school, and somehow he had learnt that I was playing the truant all the time. However, Betsy unconsciously came to my aid, in a measure. Her sweetheart had gone to Leeds, and, owing to her being unable to use a pen, I was sworn in as love-letter-writer extraordinary. This service she fixed at the fee of one penny per letter, and so well was it done that she at once procured me two more clients; but, with her connivance, my charge to them was twopence per missive. Thus did I raise the wind for two plays ere the week was over, the second one of which I saw to its close, owing to my father being out late and to Betsy screening me in this disobedience to orders. Now I had opened up a new way of earning money. By the dint of judicious touting my clients increased in numbers to such an extent that on the following Tuesday night I earned tenpence!—three plays and a pennyworth of "humbugs" at one fell swoop! I felt like a Montezuma, of whom I was then reading; but he could not get farther than the gateway of that field of dazzling jewels and wealth in which Aladdin stood. Later in the week I essayed "The Green Bushes" in my table-theatre—after seeing the play twice—made a muddle of it, of course; yet pulled through by the use of melodramatic heroics, fights (which my audiences always applauded), and lines from here, there and everywhere except "The Green Bushes." Still, there were no critics present to point envious derision at a

young adapter's first work; and as I made fourpence-halfpenny out of the show the main desideratum was gained. In this manner that month passed away. The strolling players struck their camp and went, leaving me dejectedly behind—although I had given them the whole of my help all the day of their dismantling and packing—and wondering if the heavy villain, who had so majestically filled the creaking stage on so many gloriously villainous occasions, had raised a company supper of herrings and potatoes out of his "benefit" on the previous Friday night.

Then, towards the end of spring, I witnessed a sight that I shall never forget. The puddlers, blast-furnace men, roller men and minders generally at the ironworks had been on strike for some time. Peace, however, had now been made between them and their employers; and the works were thrown open, in order that the men could go in and "clean up"—*i. e.* prepare the furnaces, etc., for actual work on the following day, no pay being made for this, except in the few instances where the usual labour was not piecework. Whether it was owing to the laxity of the officials on that day or to some other cause, I know not; but some of us youngsters went in also. During the quietude of the strike the works had become so overrun with rats that the men were encouraged to fetch their dogs and whatever ferrets they could find; hence in a short time the place was a welter of excitement, snapping barks, hurrying men and boys with sticks and dead rats. At the end of it all one of the men, desperately hungry, no doubt, took the notion of roasting a rat; and when the thing was cooked and its skin stripped off, the white flesh—for it was white—so appealed to his pinched gastronomy that straight out of hand he devoured the animal, tearing the flesh from the bones with his teeth as a famished savage would. Meanwhile, he gave such praise to his discovery as an equally free-tongued epicure might give

to his favourite dish. This set others on to follow his example. For weeks gone by they had all known the dire pinch of hunger; and within half-an-hour some two hundred men and youths were roasting and eating rats, with all the avidity that hunger and licence could give. Before the end came one of the men procured some clay, made a thick cake of it, rolled three disembowelled and beheaded rats in it, and put the whole into the heart of a red fire. When he took it out and broke off the baked clay, there, skinned and white and perfectly cooked, lay the animals. His example (a trick which I remembered and put to use in later years) was also followed. Then, whilst some of them continued the work, others cooked rats by the dozen and hurried home with them to their starving families. In the succeeding winter, but apropos here, it fell to my lot to see even worse horrors as the outcome of industrial strife. The colliers spent the most of those cold months on strike against a reduction in their wages, and before work was resumed their wives were tramping the villages for miles around, begging piteously from door to door; while their children were seen regularly prowling about the backs of houses where lived men who were in work, lean-cheeked and eating any refuse of edibles that came to hand. It was a sight that I shall never forget. And only a few years prior to this—so I was told repeatedly and saw some of it—the miners all over that district and generally, I believe, throughout the West Riding, were earning a sovereign a day, and would not go to work unless they could make twelve to fifteen shillings each for a day's work. At that time they were buying pianofortes for daughters who could barely read their native tongue and certainly could not write a dozen consecutive words in it, and feeding their coursing dogs on choice legs of mutton; while the few whose thrift rose to the occasion laid by a competence for their old age.

CHAPTER VIII

The fascination of yew—A walk and some wasted lectures—I commit sacrilege—Pain and paternal points—Nursing small-pox—Seeing a wake—A gift and a lesson—I perform in public—What a prize ! —Fetching canes for self-punishment—A renegade once more—A new era in reading—Breaking a skull and being broken.

THE first happening of note during that summer was a journey to Snydale churchyard for a piece of yew with which to make a bow. Was it not Robin Hood's favourite wood for that purpose? Therefore the only right thing for an English boy to use in the same way. I had read the story of Tell, and of the Swiss, Austrian and German crossbowmen generally. But where could they be when the merry men of Sherwood Forest hopped on to the mental stage? Only as something half-remembered and unreal against the vividness of actuality. Even the magical marksmen of the Black Forest and the Rhine uplands were not in it with the wearers of Lincoln green. So it was that for some two years my patriotism had suffered a sort of frost because I could not become the proud possessor of a yew bow. Now, however, I knew where to obtain what was needed. While walking through Snydale on the previous afternoon—a Sunday—with my father, he, being a herbalist of some local repute, told me what that dark, fir-looking tree was in the churchyard there. He also talked with me about my hero of the greenwood glades; of the latter being a typical Englishman, hating injustice and all forms of tyranny, a great sportsman and a general lover of fair play—therefore a fit example, except for the outlawry, for all who would honour their country and be free men, as were Oliver Cromwell, Wat Tyler, and others who

had risen against tyrants for the good of their fellows. In fact, it was my father who first, and often, repeated to me that old bit of national bombast—

“One Frenchman to two Portugee,
And one jolly Englishman will beat all three.”

In this manner the remainder of that walk was made, during which my half-attentive ears did not take in a quarter of the historical instruction, homilies on courage and uprightness, the glory of moral courage to do what was right in the face of wrong-headed custom, the greater glories of being English and all that appertained thereto, and some less-remembered subjects which were poured into my indifferent understanding. All this being according to habit and enforced usage; for our walks together were always tours of information and catechism; and the more readily I jumped to the various matters, asking questions and grasping the points, the more pleasant was our ramble or day's outing, the greater my portion of praise, and the same of my possible reward, when we arrived home. For it was my father's unchecked bent to give with both hands, whether he gave censure or applause, largess or chastisement. All the same, on that occasion the majority of my questions were directed (I write “directed” advisedly, because it has often been put to me that one of my mental deficiencies was a lack of subtlety—that is, as finished man now goes; I was always too much of the simple child in peace, too much of the simple savage in warfare)—so I directed the most of my queries to yew, English bowmen—yew, foreign crossbowmen—yew, English victories in mediæval France—yew, bow-shooting *versus* gun-shooting—yew, and so on.

When my school-fee was paid on the following day and playtime came on the open ground, I stole away down the road, around the bend, then did a run, and

was safe. After walking leisurely out to Snydale—the weather being fine—I ate the pocket dinner which Betsy now usually put up for me in place of the old-time bread-and-anything that came in my foraging way. In the meantime the yew-tree was reconnoitred for its most likely tribute to my necessities; my knife was also brought to its finest edge on a handy flagstone, whilst I kept a wary eye open, lest any villager should see me at this incriminatory piece of work. (When I subsequently saw the sharpening of the knife in “The Dumb Man of Manchester,” my mind went back to that occasion.) Then I crept into the churchyard and began my sacrilegious business. And wasn’t it a fine stick at which which I worked so vigorously!—but how tough! What a splendid bow it would make, I thought. How it would have brought me pride and envy in overflowing measure! Yes, but my vaulting ambition had leapt at something beyond my powers. Ere the stick was free, an interfering villager happened along, and was on me before I knew of his presence. I bolted, he chased, caught and dragged me off to the parsonage. Then what a half-hour of stern lecturing was mine! There and then I vowed, over and over again, that in future I would be satisfied with a small sufficiency, rather than try for the biggest I could reach. But how vain are these Jack-in-office vows when the populace of temperament rises against them! The lark might as well swear neither to rise nor sing. And this vow was extracted from me under “undue influence.” Finally, after I had been threatened with all manner of pains and penalties, and had given my name and address—the expedient of an alias not having occurred to my simplicity—I was allowed to go. Later in the day that vicar called on my father, found him at home, and when I retired for the night—supperless and much earlier than usual—it was with the conviction that all the yew bows in Christen-

dom, and all the patriotism and pride that a boy could feel at being English, would not pay for half my pain. At the same time there was again the old rebellion, and the desire to run away and go to Mary's grave. Nor was this punishment—which was made all the more severe and prolonged because I would not cry out—for my truancy at all; it was for that primal eldest sin, all accompanied by the reiterated query: "Will you do as you're told?" Meanwhile, as usual, Betsy cried silently in the kitchen-scuttery, and almost rebelled openly against authority. As a matter of fact, I do not think my father really cared at this time whether I went to school or not, so be that I spent my time in general literature, trying to build things, asking questions, and commonly seeking to acquire knowledge. He had already avowed his intention of making an engineer of me, and apparently did not think that much village schooling was needed to that end. His only real concern now and then was at the backward condition of my arithmetic, of which he irregularly took charge, and forced to a more satisfactory state. To him "The Child's Guide to Knowledge" was a book that should be always under a youngster's pillow at night, and in his hands or pockets during the day. Given that precious volume, others of its sort, an inquiring mind, intelligent encouragement, and general furtherance along a natural course, and education in early life could not go far wrong. He never exhibited patience when dealing with a dunderhead. But what angered him most was disobedience. He was one who held that not only was filial piety the crowning virtue of childhood (and in later years I saw it all again when reading the doings of the pious Æneas), but that in all things and ways it was absolutely necessary to the smooth running of the world's affairs, the equilibrium of society, and the upward progress of mankind. Let that be, and all else

would come that should come; wipe it out, and you blocked the eternal springs of all good, removed the foundations of civilized life, and set humanity headlong back to the dark abyss of conjectural origin.

In addition to the physical punishment on this occasion, I was subjected to the greater penalty of having my spending-money stopped; but some of it was made up for by increased labours—assisted by the ever-sympathizing Betsy—as the scribe of love. I also earned several coppers weekly from Mrs. Naughton by doing errands for her and looking after her eldest child, a bonny girl of three years, ~~and~~ of whom I was very fond. At this time the Naughtons had moved to a house half-a-mile or more away, and thither I took myself and my bottled-up woes, to find sunshine, prattle and play with the little one, also with a small boy-friend, of about five years and named Tom, whose acquaintance I had made in that locality, and of whom more by-and-by. Then, some days after my yew affair, the child fell sick, and would hardly be parted from me. Hence I was with her, nursing her mostly, for three or four days. Thus a doctor was called in, and the complaint found to be small-pox. But there was no compulsory isolation at that time. She would not be parted from me, nor I from her. My father was informed of how matters stood, and replied: "Let him stay. If he has to have it, he will; if he hasn't, he won't—and he can't run more risk than he has done already." That was his philosophy on all such occasions, and it was usually expressed as shortly.

So I remained at my new occupation night and day. In the meantime, Betsy came to me whenever she wanted a letter written, or the same done for any of my other clients—one of whom, who had a lover at Wakefield, another at Leeds, and one at the local mines, was mostly in arrears of pay, albeit I did now and then blackmail

her into settlement and a penny or twopence over, under a threat to tell the local man of the other two. Then, when my little friend was fairly out of danger, her infant sister was attacked by the fever; and Parson Lane came and baptized her as she lay in my arms. Hence it fell out that I nursed both of them, on my knees during much of each day, in an old-fashioned rocking-chair, till both were fully recovered—me humming grandmother's ballads of murder, sudden death, and love-lorn swains and damsels, intermixed by those old Irish songs from the broadsheets.

And hereby hangs another story, which may as well be told here. Close by there was a little colony of Irish, the most of whose men were ironworkers. And, notwithstanding the many fights I had more or less enjoyed with one Michael and another Dennis Macdonald, some of the women so took to me, over "The Croppy Boy," "Bold Brennan," and the like, that they could neither do enough for me nor sing my praises sufficiently high and wide. They *knew* that I was Irish—else how could I know such songs? Besides, there was my name, and I could talk the brogue, as witness my singing (?) of "Paddy Haggerty's Leather Breeches," etc. (Well, these two facts have misled many better-informed persons than those rough but simple-hearted Irish-women.) However, some six or eight months subsequent to this affair, one of their men died; they held a wake over him, and at my solicitation I was permitted to be present a while. But of the scene—the upright dead in its coffin (which, owing to that temperamental inability to see that death meant some awful change and stupendous, undiscovered secret, was merely interesting to me), the candles to light it on its way, and the coin to pay the toll—that Hibernian equivalent to the Greek sop to Cerebus; the incongruous riot of grief and defiant merriment; the weeping of the women, and amongst the

men generally a strong atmosphere of "there isn't a man in the house that can thread on the tail o' me coat"; the fiddler in the corner scraping blithely at "The Irish Washerwoman," then making the air uncanny with what must have been some soul-searching Irish folk-music, or his own impromptus, with its blended wail of heartache, sweetness, human appeal, and the pathetic futility of things; the whisky, and all the rampant and the blurred details of the affair; these I beg to leave to the reader's imagination. To tell a tale out of school in explanation of this, I may need it all in a piece of fiction which is now under hand. Yet when, in after years, I chanced to be present at a humble Breton wedding, the involuntary thought rushed through my mind: How curiously like that wake at Normanton!

Before the younger of the two children was quite recovered—the elder being out and about again, and I had gone back to my home and my former ways, with a daily visit to my recent patients—Naughton made me a present of a fine new bat, a double set of stumps, and a proper, red ball. This was on a Monday afternoon, the things having been purchased at Wakefield on the previous Saturday night. Now I, who had so far owned but two indifferent bats in my life, and had many a time been made to do double fielding or stumping for one innings, because of my poverty in gear (alas! how hard is the road to the tender feet of the poor!)—now, indeed, "that motherless brat o' mischief" would be the plutocrat of the playfield; would sit on the throne of power and say who should and who should not officiate at the national ceremony of cricket. With all my pride puffing me out like a blown-up frog, and the glory of a grand possession transfiguring my face, I went home, carrying the great acquisition on my shoulder. When I entered the house, my father was in, and said—

"What have you there?"

"Some cricket things Mr. Naughton's given me."

"What for?"

"For nursing Emmy and the baby."

"Then take them back—go on, pick 'em up and take 'em straight back; and tell Mr. Naughton I don't allow you to take gifts for doing what's right.—Wait, I'll come with you."

Some two months prior to this he had whipped me the more because I would not cry out; now, in my heart mostly, I cried in sheer loneliness of feeling, in the sudden loss of my wealth, and in the sensitiveness of still being an outsider in the games on the field; but the few tears that fell I dared not let him see. Thus he marched me back to the Naughtons'; and in that act, as in the expulsion of the gin-drinker, I saw, and now see more clearly, his mother in him. But the surrender of my prize was not to be. There was much talk and kindly argument, while I stood by, too spiritless to play with Emmy, the life of my joy hanging on the thread of my advocate's eloquence. In the end I was allowed to go off with my glories, after being told, with finger uplifted admonitorily, to "bear it in mind, those things were not for nursing the children, but just a gift from Mr. Naughton." Ah, well! probably it was better that my high-and-mightiness should receive such a check at its zenith than to be allowed to play the Juggernaut car over the feelings of other, and likely enough more deserving, youngsters.

Not long after this (before which time my ninepence a week had been restored, threepence of it now being allowed me to spend at a second-hand bookshop that had opened down by the fair-field and near the home of "Taffy" Jones, as I was presently to regret most deeply) there came another instance of my vaulting ambition overleaping itself, of jumping the hedge for

clover and finding myself amongst nettles and thistles. The members of an adjacent chapel (the Primitive Methodist, I believe) were about to celebrate the anniversary of their building, Sunday school, or something of that, and boys and girls were wanted to "say pieces." Apparently they were rather hard up in this way. At any rate, my theatrical productions seemed to suggest to some rather elder acquaintances that I was one of the boys who were particularly wanted. There would be a prize, I was assured. Uninfluenced by this reminder, yet powerfully drawn by the idea of appearing before a whole chapelful of grown-ups and children, all in their best, and me alone on the centre of the stage, I bore my friends company to the mid-week rehearsal. When the superintendent had tested my elocutionary powers, he gave me a "piece to say"—how it impressed me is seen in the fact that I remember nothing of it—told me to "be careful of the stops," and said that I should have to attend the Sunday school twice before the anniversary, or I could neither "say a piece" nor go to the children's subsequent feast of cake and tea and oranges. The conditions of the engagement were faithfully kept, without my father being taken into the secret. Then the great day came, and I, being one of those who mattered, was on the platform, watching all the "piece-sayers" who went before me, and thinking what sticks the most of them were. At last my turn came. Up I rose, even as a Jack-in-the-box, hurried to the edge of the platform, forgot everything I knew, except that overwhelming sea of faces and staring eyes, and—launched like a cataract into "Alonzo the Brave, or the Fair Imogen!" Where my "piece" had gone to goodness only knew. I did not realize even where I stood. The sole idea in my head was that I had to "say something," and the first thing that came to my tongue went forth like a herd of wild horses. Besides, in addition to that "mophead" of

light brown hair bobbing about, my hands were going as they would have done had I been standing on the table in front of my toy-theatre. Surely no such "piece" had ever before been flung out at a chapel anniversary! And apparently the congregation thought so too, for they instantly sat upright and craned their necks at me. But the superintendent, acting as prompter, rushed into the fray when I was in the third stanza. Probably amazement had kept him back till then. However, he jerked me into silence, whispered that I was "not saying my piece," and repeated the first few lines of the proper thing. But it was all for naught: in spite of having a memory so retentive that anything could be committed to it by two or three readings, that "piece," as a piece, had gone from my mind for ever. So, as a compromise, I was allowed to fill in the gap with "How doth the little busy bee"; and immediately on delivering the last line I ran into "Let dogs delight to bark and bite." As a matter of simple fact, if the superintendent had not hauled me off at the end of the second little moral, I should probably have continued; for my repertoire, including songs, ballads, Christmas pieces and fragments of plays, would have kept the congregation there till midnight. I did not go to the "feast" on the following day. Cake had never been of much attraction to me; to tea I was unaccustomed, and thought it nasty (both at home and at grandmother's tea was for grown-ups only, and not much for men, either), and the noisy crowd ran counter to my taste and love of seclusion. But I attended the prize distribution in the schoolroom, some evenings later. It had reached my ears that I was to receive a book; and I did, the title of it being "Parents' Responsibility." That was the only book in my library that I never read. After wading through the first few pages and finding no interest, I put the precious volume away and left it there. Nor did I ever again offer to say

a "piece" at a chapel anniversary. It was the only school prize that had come my way, and I never tried for another.

It seemed as if all my luck was out during that summer. Not long after the above affair a most untoward chance befell me; moreover, it came in a very inauspicious period, for I was then fairly well-behaving myself by putting in quite two-thirds of the regulation time at school. Truth to tell, it was this unconsidered good behaviour and attendance which landed me in for this reverse and a whole string of dependent misfortunes. (Yet there are non-analytic persons who will maintain that evil never springs from good. It would be as well to say that the good earth produces nothing that is poisonous.) And to my illogical mind, which was so prone to see effects that causes were commonly ignored, this was enough to send any self-respecting lad straight into the woods and stay there. But the happening was this. Our master—whose name, so appropriate to his calling, was Cumberbirch—suddenly ran short of canes; and, possibly in a moment of forgetfulness, he sent me to fetch half-a-dozen which were on order at the shop kept by "Taffy" Jones's parents in the business part of the village. The objective was reached without hindrance at the end of ten minutes or so, and the implements were secured. Then I fell to temptation by the way. That second-hand bookshop was close to "Taffy's" home. There was a large stall in front of the window, and I took to browsing on those green, neglected pastures of, mostly, unknown minds. At the end of about an hour I went on my way, sublimely unconscious of the lapse of time—even as I did many years afterwards, when serving County Court summonses and writing sonnets amongst the hills and mines of Glamorganshire—and whistling one of my favourite, mournful Irish airs, all out of tune. When I arrived at

the school, something like an hour and a half behind time, it was to be told to hold my hand out—and me not even given grace enough to apply the supposed magic of a damp hand and crossed hairs to split the cane. All the same, three of those canes were shivered on my hands, less any delay or ceremony; and for two weeks thereafter I was a renegade; brooding in secret over the country at large, asked, whenever I met certain of my schoolfellows, “Who fetched canes to be punished?” drawn into numerous fights in consequence, and wishing that Mary’s grave was near enough for daily visits. I sometimes feared that the authorities would hobble me at school, as my father had said was done in his youth, by locking a block of wood to the truant’s leg. This would have been maddening; but I was saved from such desperation. I would have gone to Newmillerdam again, but some little while before this time my grandparents had lost the farmstead, and been compelled to move into a cottage, where, from what I had heard, there was no room for me. One great drawback to this was that I might never again know the epicurean joys of lamb’s-tail pie; and, in spite of my having no fastidiousness in such things, this was a real loss. However, I still had my three little friends to go to, as I always did when in trouble or in unusually high spirits and with money to spend.

It was at this time that I found copies of “The Pilgrim’s Progress,” and, immediately afterwards, “The Holy War,” in my happy hunting-ground by “Taffy” Jones’s, and had the two books explained to me in detail by my father. He happened to see me with the former one on the first evening of my carrying it home, and there and then fell to the congenial task of imparting information. Finding me keenly interested in what he said, he pursued the subject. This went on during several consecutive evenings. In the meantime we drew

together again, an elder and a younger companion, as we did whenever the matter at issue was really welcome to both. Then I turned up with "The Holy War," a curious duodecimo volume with some of the strangest and crudest wood-cuts that I had ever clapped eyes on. It was in antiquated spelling, and I now believe that the book was valuable. I gave three-halfpence for my treasure. However, here again came instruction, continued from evening to evening. This was my first real entrance into the world of allegory, and was made so complete and found to be so absorbing that my search for similar things went on intermittently from that day for many years afterwards. To me it was a new era in reading, and one to which I was to be much drawn in later times.

Moved by this short spell of peace and pleasantness, I, on my own accord, resumed attendances at school. But misfortune again attended on me. It chanced that some renovating was being carried on in and about the church. On the northern side of the building there was a large stone gutter, some three or four feet of earth, then a flagged path that led from a meadow-path to the road by the school, and was apparently a right of way. When going to the morning lessons some of us passed down that way, where a labourer was then taking up the gutter and trenching close to the wall. In this work bones came up now and then, and as we went by an almost complete human skull appeared. It rolled down the heap of soft earth and came so near to my feet that, in mere curiosity, I picked it up. This brought some of the other boys close about me, most of them showing a dread that was a dead-letter to me. Just ahead of us "Taffy" Jones pulled up and turned about, apparently to ascertain why we had stopped. Now "Taffy" (whose nickname was due to what we supposed to be his nationality) was a big, lumbering lad of fifteen years, rather

distorted features, the most appalling double squint that I ever saw, a snuffling habit, and a head that outwardly went before his awkward feet, but was pitifully behind them inwardly. To us, rude barbarians that we were, in whose materialism there was no place except for the strong and fit, poor "Taffy" was an object of toleration generally and, alas! of derision too often. As he realized what I held, he let out a muffled exclamation of horror, then cried—

"Put it down! Put it down! It'll come for you to-night!"

"Go on—I'll throw it at you," said I, quietly indifferent, and without meaning to do anything of the sort.

At this "Taffy" became more voluble, and I repeated my threat; whereon the man in the trench said, "Ay, lad, throw it."

Regardless of him, I looked at the exhumed relic, which was to me but a thing of speculation; and ever since that day "Alas! poor Yorick," or a sight of Hamlet by the grave, has always taken my mind straight back to the scene of which I write. While I looked at the thing, my mind was conning those lines in "Alonzo the Brave"—

"And the worms they crept in and the worms they crept out,
And circled his eyelids and temples about."

Then "Taffy" called out, "Put it down, or the ghost will come for you to-night!"

"Get away, you ninny, or I'll bang it at you!" was my reply, which the workman backed up with further incentives. "Taffy" became more imperative in his fright. I pretended to throw the thing. The others drew away, in what I now see as new fear. "Taffy" cried aloud, "Put it down! Put it down! Put it down!" My hand went back in the action of throwing. The man—unconsciously playing Mephistopheles to my Faust, if such a simile may be allowed—grinned, and whispered

that I dared not keep my word. "Taffy" delivered a more impressive injunction that I should relinquish the thing. In reply I hurled it at him, he being then some ten feet away. In the nick of time he turned his face in the other direction, causing the back of his head to be struck by the skull, which, owing to its age, shattered to pieces, and a few bits went down inside his collar. With a yell that came back to my mind when, twenty years later, a shark took a shipmate down in the Gulf of Mexico, away went "Taffy" for the churchyard gates and the school, with the others straggling hurriedly along between him and me.

Looking at the fragments of the skull, wondering if another would come up, and if I should be allowed to take it home—supposing that one did appear—and regretting the destruction of that one, for possessory reasons only, I sauntered on, leaving my earth-stained incensor grinning in the trench, and incidentally thinking that "Taffy's" father had no business to sell canes to schoolmasters. Not inappropriately I passed the grave of the one who "died a violent death," read those words, for the thousandth time, as I went by, and thought of that murdered postboy under the time-worn headstone on my right. It did not appeal to my perception—so wooden and dull on some matters as to obtain me the stigma of dunce and fool with certain persons, on others so needle-like that I was at times dubbed "precocious," and "more R than F"—that I had done anything wrong. This, and the fact that the final, quick, assembling bell had not been rung, was why I sailed along so easily. And, having no guilty conscience to accuse me, why should I fear the finding of a tribunal of even the existence of which I did not dream? But retribution awaited on me, as it usually did, with far more readiness than good fortune has ever conceded as my due. The moment I entered the long, open schoolroom, its

double doors were closed behind me in a manner that evidenced a previous watch for my coming, which I considered to be an unjustified and unfair proceeding. I was pounced upon, like a wounded wasp fallen into a colony of ants. The shrieking complainant's testimony had been taken, and those tell-tale morsels of deceased man hauled out from the inside of his collar; he then stood by the master's desk, shivering as a personified ague, and appearing as though his wits had wholly left him. The witnesses against me had already spoken, doubtless all together and in a gabble, like Farmer Lake's turkey-cocks at feeding-time; most of them feared to speak in my presence. There was no proper trial held; perhaps Mr. Cumberbirch's lack of knowledge concerning court procedure was the reason. I was plainly asked if I had thrown a dead skull at Thomas Jones. Pride in my doings always kept me from denying them. My head went back, a bold "Yes" was my answer and the signature to the warrant of my committal to punishment. . . .

During playtime I remained in prison. On being released for dinner, I went off aching, smarting and silent, apart from all—a melancholy lad. Twenty minutes later, when matters around the schoolhouse had grown quiet, I returned through the fields off the end of the building. From a good vantage-point I vented five large stones at those rear windows, then fled—to be thereafter an outcast from school, a "little savage" Ishmaelite of the fields and roads, at whom the youthful finger of derision was ever pointing.

CHAPTER IX

Four days in durance vile—Plans of vengeance—An interruption—A unique tress—In trouble again—A new school—Hauled before magistrates—A race for life—Breaking ice to bathe—Some money matters—I become a club reader—Cock-fighting—To a distant school—An old friend turns up—A reprehensible “lark,” and a new influence.

THE moral of the foregone episode, if there be one in it, I will leave to the reader. Let it be enough to say that the schoolmaster paid my father a visit early in the evening; that they were closeted privately for a considerable time—during which I, now at the tail-end of the savagery which my midday punishment had once more called up from the shallow deeps of its repose, meditated several courses of action, the chief one being immediate flight; that when Mr. Cumberbirch left the house, my father gave me a private audience (whilst, as I discovered next day, faithful Betsy listened and wept in secret); that at the end of it I was escorted to bed, with undue close attention, and learning the while that I had been “turned out of school as an untractable disgrace”; that every scrap of my outdoor clothing was taken away, I knew not where; that physical pain and divers plots and plans of outlawry kept me awake till far into the night; that the morning found me a prisoner without a chance of escape or a line of reading matter; that Betsy had been threatened with instant dismissal if she ministered to my desires, beyond supplying a stipulated diet of a rigorously simple nature, against which command she mutinied in a tasty and plentiful manner towards noon; and that during four whole days

this close confinement—with “Pilgrim’s Progress,” “Foxe’s Book of Martyrs” and a couple of tracts allowed in on the third day—the penitentiary fare and Betsy’s once-a-day breaking through this rule were continued.

Then I emerged again on the outer world, a more woeful, gloomy and vengeful boy, if not a wiser. Now I had no need to play truant. The school would not have me; and my father seemed not to care, for the time being, what became of me, and small blame to him if that was his state of mind. Since those days I, too, have learnt the bitter, bitter lesson of continual efforts which bore no good results, apparently.—Let be. As to my being expelled for what was no more than a boyish escapade—there had already been quite a sufficiency of commas and semicolons in the sentence; this was the full stop. True to the inherent waywardness—to give it no harsh name—of past years, I made straight for the school on the first morning of my freedom, with the heartfelt intention of breaking every one of its hundreds of diamond panes, killing “Taffy” Jones into the bargain (or something of that sort), and of—well, I was not quite sure what punishment to mete out to the master, but I had a vague notion that his death should be akin to that of St. Stephen’s; to this end I carried my best sling, a warlike implement with which I had some adeptness, and one that would give me the advantage of distance over greater physical strength than mine was.

But unseen forces were at work. As I followed the trail of Love Lane, thirsting for revolution and hungry for war, I overtook a smaller boy-acquaintance. He was in tears. His younger sister had fallen sick, was expected to die before noon; and he was on his way to school, late, and the cane as an assured greeting when he arrived. I, also, had lost a little sister; and it seemed that I was never either to forget that fact or break

entirely away from its consequent loneliness. My heart, too, was aching under injustice and the pathetic futility of things. In my pocket there were seven pennies, which Betsy had collected for me on the previous evening as arrears on epistolary services; and in the end I persuaded him aside to some shops at the end of the lane, where we spent threepence in delectables; then stole past the unobservant gatekeeper in the box at the entrance to the ironworks and watched the mighty hammer and the great rollers working till noon, when we hurried to our homes. My afternoon went along with the son—a youth—of the head-horse-keeper at the mines, amongst the herd of unbroken ponies that were kept to replace the worn-out ones below and to supply extra ones where needed.

On the following day my terrible vengeance had lost its stiffening. When I could go to school every path and road seemed to lead my erring feet elsewhere, now some unrecognized agency drew me in that direction. Yet some of my critics said, and said often, that I was hardly human! I entered the churchyard, found the labourers still at work as before and spent the day with them, watching every spadeful of earth to see what it contained in the way of human interest and helping wherever they would let me—till the advent of Parson Lane put me to flight and kept me in hiding till he had gone. Then I returned, to be the object of much mixed attention when a crowd of my late schoolfellows came trooping by; to some of them I was a sort of deified hero, to be regarded with awe and at a little distance; while to others I was “a silly ass,” fit only for jibes and derision—such is the world generally, whether sectionally or as a whole; the golden mean is the unknown road. Still, with the exception of such lusty youths as Tom Lake and about a score of others who did not come that way, the majority of them had high regard for my

hands—and feet when the enemy gathered in numbers—and those staying powers which my outdoor life and a large wholesome diet had given to me and were to be such a source of surprise in later years. Towards the end of the day I noticed a tress of black hair turn up from the trench. It was uncommonly long, of fine silken texture, and I picked it up—not once thinking whence it came, until a passing girl cried out that I was “robbing a grave of a dead woman’s hair!” I thought she was both unwisely frightened and interfering even for a girl, said that the dead woman had no longer any need of the tress; and that if so, she (my upbraider) had no business in the matter, and went home working the hair up into a watch-chain. But again ill-luck was my portion. After tea I sat down to finish the making of my hair-chain, foretasting the pride and distinction which it would give me and feeling that now frequent delight in construction. Then my father came in, saw what I was doing, and asked where I got the hair. Innocently I told him and felt my ear tingle to hot rebellion at the instant. Within two minutes we were away,—me in front, smarting and full of mutiny that dared not show itself; he close behind, with a light walking-cane that was worse than any of Mr. Cumberbirch’s, and giving me thumbnail lectures till the half-made chain was deposited on the earth mound by the church; then we returned home, in the same manner, and again I went supperless to bed.

During this holiday I learnt to swim, in the river Calder, by “one-legging it” down the black stream, heedless of its carrying me to what we all knew to be a long, deep pool, till I found that I could not touch bottom, then having to swim or drown. I swam—until a jutting shoal from the bank pulled me up. Then out I scrambled, raced back to the other boys, not one of whom could swim, and pridefully showed that I *could*—

by swimming again and again over the pool. At the end of about a month my father arranged for me to go to the small, private school at the end of Snydale Lane and almost opposite the church school. This was kept by a Mr. Rabbitt, the most of his scholars being day-boarders, with about half-a-dozen who lived-in. Their nickname, with the church-school boys and girls, was naturally "Rabbitts"; while they in turn called the others "Bulldogs"; and many a wild snowball-scrimage had I enjoyed, as one of the latter, against the "Rabbitts," whom we always conquered and drove into shelter, solely because of our overpowering numbers. But now, alas! I was to be one of the weaker party, and I did not look forward with pleasure to the coming winter. Had I been at all observing as to the common sequence of past events I should have known better than to reckon my chickens before they were hatched, even in such a matter as being six or eight months under Mr. Rabbitt's excellent tuition. As a matter of fact, my time there was much shorter; the place had too rarefied an atmosphere of respectability for me to remain there long. Not that anything I did there broke my connection with the school. No, the rupture came about in this wise.

Farmer Walker, at the old end of the village, died, and the usual sale of stock and implements took place. Some of us boys managed to be at the sale; and, as the farmstead was not sold then, we—by a deductive reasoning which must be admitted to be natural—came to the conclusion that it belonged to no one, except to the dead man. Therefore we were at liberty to roam about the place and do as we pleased until it was bought by some one. And as the apples and pears in the orchard were in fairly good condition, many of us boys made repeated raids on them; with the result that one of the constables walked in and caught two of us

amongst the fruit above, also one smaller boy to whom we were throwing down whatever we could lay hands on. (I was always one of the unlucky ones.) He took us down to the lock-up, the little fellow loudly lamenting in front, a rude, great-handed grip on the shoulders of the other boy and me, and a semicircular crowd of youngsters about us to witness our degradation and hurry to our homes with the news immediately we were inside those portals, which said far more to us than "Abandon hope all ye who enter here" said to Dante. We were put into a very small yard with a very high wall where there hung some birch-wands, and the thought at once occurred to me: Twice I have been with you before, at grandmother's and at the school here, and have not felt you—now, is the third time to "pay for all"? We were kept there a good half-hour, going through all sorts of mental tortures and knowing not what awful fate was to fall upon us. Then came liberty, and with it the consciousness that I had three apples in my pocket. It was early evening, and I stole into a corner of the fair-field, back of my old bookshop, and began to eat the fruit. A boy came along and tried to beg some. I answered that I hadn't been into the lock-up to fetch apples for him. They were of the kind known as "winter cookers"; but to me, seeing what I had paid for them, they were as the apples of Pyban—had I known all that I was to pay for them they would have been more precious still. There is no wonder that the apple has so often been the fruit of traditional discord. To my honest thinking there is really a sort of curse on the apple. I can look back to many cases where it has caused much trouble which no other fruit would have stirred up. In my own case it had brought warm occasions to me at grandmother's, at Barnsley, here previously, and now there came in its wake: a sound thrashing when I arrived home that evening;

lectures, suspicion and ostracism when I went to school next day; a reduction in my pocket-money; then a summons to appear before the magistrates at Wakefield; another whipping when the blue mandate came; a fine of five shillings "or seven days" (my father took me to the courthouse, under the impression that an appearance before the dreaded "bench" would do me some moral and spiritual good); a complete stoppage of my spending-money, and expulsion from Mr. Rabbitt's academy. And, of course, the last was quite right. For how could an "untractable disgrace," that was now an openly convicted felon, be allowed to remain in the tranquil bosom of so much superior respectability? Ye gods of the British fetish, what heresy were here otherwise! Now was I an outcast indeed, and hanging could alone be my end. The smaller boy had been acquitted on the score of age; the other one, who was similarly fined, was the son of an ironworker and lived I knew not where, so that practically I stood alone in my infamy.

Thus it was that for months I spent the life of an Ishmaelite. So winter came down, bringing an early and a long "black" frost. On the third morning of this I took my skates to a neighbouring brickfield, then in disuse and having a large, long pond. Not a soul was in sight. What a fine spin I would have alone. Quickly the steels, with their long, curved-up points, such as are rarely seen now-a-days, were strapped on, and off I went—to find, when I was ten or a dozen yards from the bank, that the ice was going down under me as I sped along. This was what had apparently happened: On the previous night some one had broken the whole of the ice into pieces which were four or five feet roughly square, and the night's frost had merely joined them together; so that each one, as I went over it, broke away from its fellows. By some strange instinct I knew that turning would be fatal. I was going

lengthwise of the pond. How I flew; how each foot was jerked up with lightning speed as each particular floe sank under it; how I almost held my breath, strained for the shore ahead and intuitively felt that my life depended on lightness and speed! Then a final jump, with hands outstretched to grasp the sloping bank, and waist-deep I went—to scramble out, sit down, pant and look back along the broken watery track I had made; while there seemed to linger about me a faint and curious suggestion of that spirit-hand on my head in the cellar.

This was skating enough for one day. But my father, who had been put to some important night duty, was at home; so off came the skates and I squelched my way to the blacksmith's shop at the old end of the village, confident that I should be allowed to dry my clothes by the forge, if I blew the bellows meanwhile. So it came about. In the meantime I now and then dwelt on the race for life; how I might have gone in, some one fetched me out and have got a medal for saving life; and with it came an idea which remained in my mind up to manhood—I would like to have a medal for saving life and would try for one whenever chance arose. I returned home in the evening, when the coast was clear. Then the frost broke and came again; and five of us were away for the day. We came upon a rough sort of sheep-wash frozen over. Some one said he would break the ice to bathe; another bragged that he would go in too if the first one did; others dared them to the great adventure. In the end the ice was broken and three of us went in, and I cannot say that it was a mere dip.

At Christmas that year I played Slasher in "The Peace Egg," commissioned one of the smiths at the mine—I believe he was the one for whose sweetheart I still wrote letters to other men—to forge my sword, and great was the forging thereof, worthy of, at least, a Byronic canto. But the box-office—on Devil-doubt's

back—was not so good on this occasion. Although I was playing a much superior part, my share was only nine shillings. By this time my father had returned to his former habit of schooling me and had restored sixpence a week of my former pocket-money, with the command that only half of it should be spent on periodicals, the other being expended on more permanent reading matter. What I earned by letter-writing and anything else that did not interfere with my lessons I could spend as I pleased. So it was with my nine shillings, five of which went in another table-theatre, this time a stronger one with more wood about it, and for which I manufactured all the characters and most of the scenery out of cardboard, wood, a sixpenny box of paints and home-made paste—whereby there came much pleasure, some knowledge, and the joy of having so large and strong a proscenium with three tiny foot-lights. By this means I augmented my income considerably—till the annual visit of the big booth-theatre, when I lost nearly all my audience, because I had provided for one in its teens, who could afford a weekly threepence for the real thing, and in my repertoire there were no plays for more juvenile minds. This was a sad loss to me, because it so largely curtailed my own visits to the booth; and, owing to my father being at the mine each evening except Saturday, I could remain to the end of a play. Then Betsy came again to my rescue by rounding-up my epistolary clients, obtaining me a couple of recruits, and by starting a new venture; this was the post of reader to half-a-dozen young women like herself, on two nights a week. They gathered at some house—mostly at ours—about six o'clock, and sat around with their sewing or knitting while I read high society stories from *The Young Ladies' Journal*, *Bow Bells* and *The London Reader* until nine o'clock; and giving to the dialogue that enunciatory declamation

which had been acquired in my table performances and now quite delighted my employers. For this service I received a penny per evening from each member of the club, and the delectable literature was provided amongst themselves, generally by a gamble as to who should buy the whole three papers for that week. Thus I was able to "treat" Betsy to the theatre on the following Saturday night—after obtaining father's permission to see the play out, on condition that she accompanied me—while she bought hot potatoes and roasted chestnuts for us during the two pieces, both of which I had seen before, and chattered about them so volubly to her that some of our neighbours threatened to put me under the seat if I did not hold my tongue.

Then there came another source of income. The women's reading-club led some of the men, non-drinkers and quite well-conducted for their class, to band themselves together for the same purpose. At first I had five of them, the material being newspapers and my rate of payment identical with what I received from the other club. The hours were six to eight, on three evenings a week; but the numbers soon grew to ten. Then I was offered sixpence a night for five nights a week, and had to resign my earlier post or let some other boy take the better one. I chose the former course, all with my father's consent when he knew who the men were. It was in connection with this affair that I learnt something of cockfighting, in which a part of the men indulged secretly—that is, I saw the birds prepared for battle by having their combs cut off and the bleeding stopped by wads of cobweb, which I was commissioned to procure; and by the insertion of small razor-like penknife blades in the places of defective spurs, till one of the men secured properly-made steel spurs to fasten to the cocks' legs by fine string. At times I also witnessed a contest, when two members of

my club pitted their birds against each other; the battleground being our private reading-room, which was usually left strewn with feathers and marked by worse evidences of the fight. Of course my father knew nothing of this, or my post would have ended immediately. As for the influence of all this—well, he would be blind or hardened to the truth who would say that my connection with those two clubs was not detrimental morally; for, although Betsy's sterling qualities kept her ever on the alert in my interest, there were many more or less audible and significant remarks passed by her club companions in my presence. At the same time the whole affair was somewhat formative in other directions.

The next move educationally was my being sent to a dame's school at Warmfield, about a mile and a half away, whither I had to carry my dinner every day—this change in the order of things being, to all appearances, merely to get me out of the way daily. Here there were between forty and fifty boys and girls. On the first morning of my appearance I chanced to make a very favourable impression on the dear old lady and on the more practical daughter who assisted her. The boy who—lacking all sympathy and leading, snubbed by authority and awed by numbers till injustice, ever the worst of goads to some of us, sprung the savage to life in him—was "a dunce and a reprobate" at the other two schools was here "a precocious boy," merely because the first half of the morning's lessons were congenial and tapped the best of his little stock of knowledge. Then came playtime, and with it a hoax played on me, as "the new boy," by one who was older and bigger than I. By this a book from the school library was left on the playground and the blame on me. At noon I found my hoaxer; and when we assembled for the afternoon lessons I had a first-class black eye and my

opponent stood forth in the greater ingloriousness of a more disfigured face. Of course there was an immediate trial at the bar, he being as full of words as of pain and anger, with the reiteration—"He didn't fight fair!" I waited till question-time, then told my story so briefly and quietly that I was believed. All the same, I did not escape censure which rankled against my lack of logic and led to other upheavals. Thus came blight on an auspicious beginning, and, on the whole, grievous was the full season thereof; but not more so than is the generality of this record. However, I had one unalloyed pleasure at Warmfield; this was my meeting the man who gave me a lift to Heath Common and sixpence when I first ran away from home. He proved to be a sort of ostler at the Plough Inn—which was half inn, half farmstead—and knew me at once. We renewed our acquaintance there and then, and maintained it during almost every dinner hour from Monday to Friday of every week. He was a genial fellow, clean of tongue and mind, quietly humorous, cool in all things, but ever warm-hearted to the under dog, with all the inherent qualities of the humane Englishman and full of quaint ditties which warped us together as adversity does with the unfortunate. A son of the stable and the soil, "a fellow of infinite jest," indeed, for wise saws and healthy, bare-armed humanity, he might have stepped straight from one of Shakespeare's plays. What wonder that I loved him, learnt from him to value horse and dog almost as I did my bows and books, tramped many miles for the pleasure of his company, and wept sorely when I lost him.

So went that summer; at the beginning of which my reading-club had been dissolved. Winter came. There was a change in the mastership at Normanton school. My father, to save me the mile-and-a-half walk morning and evening, saw Parson Lane; and I was readmitted

to the school, with the promise that the past would be all forgotten. But promises are more easily made than records are wiped out. And mine was marked by too many points of exclamation for it to pass unnoticed. You cannot take a musk rat through a room without leaving his odour behind, unless you first cut off his tail. I had been through that room before, trailing the boards with the pungent odour of my happenings, and the smell was still there and remained there—to grow upon me and finally drive me farther afield.

But before this came about I made another friend, who brought my total up to six—the others being Betsy, the ostler, little Tom and Naughton's two children, with whom I still spent occasional hours and pennies. In the end cottage of an irregular row that abutted on some waste ground where we boys played our games and the bonfire riots of yells, powder, etc., were held, there lived an elderly man, tall, stooping, grey, with a large eagle's-beak nose, keen eyes and quiet ways. He did not work, appeared to have no friends, talked with a faint Irish brogue, and was said to have seen better days. It was because of his brogue that we young devilkins now and then paraded past the cottage after nightfall, beating an old tin pan or two and shrieking in a sing-song tune—

“Paddy went a-walking one fine day,
Lost his breeches on the way;
The men did laugh and the women did stare
To see poor Paddy with his legs all bare !—”

till one night the old man gave us a richly deserved drenching with cold water; and when I—who had got a large share of the water—went indoors, and my father learnt what had happened, he treated me to such a “talking to” that I felt both thoroughly ashamed and some pity for the lonely Irishman. It appeared that my father knew a little about him, apparently from hearsay.

Besides, once when my companions had mocked at me for reading instead of joining their game, he chanced to pass at the moment and treated them to a brief lecture for their attitude in the matter; then turning to me he said: "You read, my boy, whenever you can; and remember always, you can't read without learning something." For which reason I had thereafter entertained some friendly feeling for him. But one night, towards Christmas, five or six of us went into a neighbouring field and dragged a donkey's dead foal to the old man's cottage, leaned it upright against his door—with a thud, of course—and bolted, to hide in the darkness across the greensward, see him open the door and the foal fall in. Then we fled, making the night hideous with our whoops. But my part in this affair troubled me strangely all the remainder of that evening and during much of the following day. So that when night came again I went to his door, knocked tremulously, and when he appeared I said, "Please may I come in?" "What for?" he asked sharply. "To tell you something," answered I. And, watching me closely, he took me in, where I told him, shamefacedly, of my share in the previous night's business and how I was sorry at it all. From that hour he and I were fast friends. Looking at those years I can see that I was always more fond of my elders' company than of the society of my own kind in the matter of years. It was at this time that I often trudged out to Warmfield for the purpose of having an hour with my ostler-friend. Those for whom I entertained affection were always men, women, and children much younger than I. This old man had travelled much, read much, had what appeared to me to be many rare books, and I was the yearling that unquestioningly followed the bellwether of his fatherly leading into unknown realms of literature. Amongst many other fascinating creations of the brain and realities of history

he introduced me to was Con Cregan, in whose adventures I lived with all the vividness of actuality. He also lent me the story—a German folk-tale, I think—of a genius boy-architect, a cowherd, who fashioned a wonderful model of a cathedral out of dried turnips and afterwards became a great designer of churches and castles. This made a weighty impression on me, and my friend never missed an opportunity to point the moral and adorn the tale of talent rising in humbleness and surmounting difficulties to a great end. He it was who, unknown to all but me, set moving in my mind the desire to go abroad—a desire that grew and did not pass away till I had been, was a cripple and found my ambitions stirring forcibly in other directions than the sea. In his quiet way he was delighted at my knowing so many old Irish songs and ballads, and great were the numerous evenings which we spent together in his cottage. It was during these evenings that he questioned me on my earlier life—birthplace, grandparents, and I know not what; and often wound up with: “Ah, sure, there’s some Irish blood in ye!” But the little recitals, on my part, which drew us most together were the deaths of my mother and sister and my possession of Mary’s old brown-lustre mug.

CHAPTER X

A boy he would a-sailing go—A thumbnail story and a “ghostly” pull-up—One friend less—A sight of the sea—Some elderberry “syrup”—Sleeping in a harvest-field—Pursued hotfoot—An anxious time—Matters in brief—Midnight equestrianism—Dogged by dislike—A fight—Birched—A social outlaw—My graveyard snuggery—Smoking “measles”—Field-sights—I become a miner-boy—Away to sea.

So went the remainder of that winter, much as others had gone before it, except for there being rather less mischief and consequent pain. During those months, in addition to the many Irish and other matters gleaned from my stooping old friend, who was the most learned man whom I had known up to that time, I became thoroughly acquainted with Ainsworth and Marryat—and, of course, promptly announced my unalterable intention of becoming a sailor. With Jacob Faithful I had much, inwardly and outwardly, that was in sympathy; to Peter Simple I was also drawn considerably; but the alpha and the omega of young naval heroes was Midshipman Easy, and when he hauled up “the banter of equality and the rights of man” to the masthead, I thought he had attained the highest pinnacle in adroit finish that was possible even to a middy. From that day forward for some years the word “midshipman” was cabalistic to me. I sought high and low, where I might and where I ought not to have, for all that I could learn of the sea and seamen. It did not matter to me whether the information or the interest—both being one at that time—was in print or in the heads of acquaintances, I hunted it down. In the meantime I carried on

a desultory siege of the parental authority—fortified and emphatic “No” to my wishes; and, although there was no sign of capitulation, I took my bread and salt that I would a sailor be.

Then I had something akin to a fright. This was when the evenings had grown much shorter, and the mystery of Nature’s returning subtleties were calling me back to field and hedgerow with a voice that I distinctly heard, though not with outer ears, and never thought of trying to understand—in fact, I was then carrying a very sore finger, out of the end of which a blackcap had taken a beakful when I thrust my too-avaricious hand into his nest-hole in an oak-tree, and could not quite reach the nest, nor easily get my hand out again. Because of my father being still on night-duty and likely to remain there, I, heedless of Betsy’s gentle reminders of this sin and its possible penalty, was taking undue liberties with the hours of night. On the present occasion, after spending the latter part of the day and the early evening with little Tom at Normanton Common—where his parents had gone to live—then losing a considerable time by stopping to join the game of some boys on the roadside, I was making carelessly for home. As I passed the White Swan Inn and the blacksmith’s shop where I dried my clothes after the race for life, the church clock struck ten. Now realizing how late it was, I turned down the deserted street on my left, with the intention of going through the churchyard and the small adjoining meadow, along a part of Love Lane, and so home by the shortest route. For what care had I of graveyards in the dead o’ night? The blackest of darkness had never held unknown horrors for me. Perking myself on this fact, I passed the entrance to the vicarage, and swung in at the gateway of the consecrated ground, whistling softly for company, and thinking of the murdered postboy as I left his grave

on my right and went along the southern side of the church, my footsteps echoing loudly on the stone flags which formed the pathway.

For the right understanding of what was to follow I must go back a little. The churchyard was bounded on the side ahead of me by a rather high stone wall, with a wicket-gate opening into a meadow; and, some twelve feet on my side of the gate, the wall had been built inward, with a sharp corner that shut the gate from sight till one had rounded the corner. Further, there was a commonly accepted legend of a kind of murder having been done in that gateway, thus: A ploughboy had been sent from a farm in Woodhouse (a hamlet off the other end of the village) to fetch a newly-hafted axe from the wheelwright's by the White Swan. The story ran that he was "not quite sharp" and the butt of the other youths in his neighbourhood. The night was dark, and just as he opened the wicket-gate there appeared a figure in white directly in the opening. This "apparition" pointed a finger at him, and, in sepulchral tones, bade him go no farther. His reply was an order to get out of the way; but the "ghost" would not. Then the "daft" swung the axe from his shoulder, and the figure in white groaned and dropped on the spot; when up jumped three or four youths from the shadow of the wall, loudly complaining that the butt of their joke had committed murder. What had gone before can be easily seen. The joker had paid for the "lark" with his life; but what was supposed to have been done to the ploughboy I cannot remember.

However, towards this gate I, who fully believed the story, noisily made my way, turned the corner in the wall, and was pulled up sharply, but not before my hasty footsteps had carried me pretty close to the gate. There, a few yards into the meadow, stood a strange grey thing! I could dimly discern two long legs, a

short body, a long neck and a head. I will not say there was fear in my heart; but surprise, the sudden recollection of that story, and of the family belief that some of its members had the "gift" of seeing visitants from another world, had served more than actual fright to arrest my progress so abruptly. Vaguely I also remembered that cellar episode, and my father's oft-repeated assertion that no apparition ever hurt a human being. Still I felt very much like turning about, crossing the end of the church, and going through the parson's paddock into Love Lane—only I could not turn around. My gaze was so riveted on the object that I was powerless to break the spell. Possibly a minute passed in this manner. Then mechanically my hand, outstretched rather beyond my balance, came heavily down on the latch of the gate. There was a sharp click on the still air; the gate came inwards, and that grey something turned on the path ahead. At that instant I recognized it as Parson Lane's white cob, which had apparently made a way through the hedge between the two meadows. It had been standing directly head-on to the gateway, and, hearing the clatter of my footsteps on the flagged path, had doubtless raised its head to listen, thus enabling me to see only its two fore-legs, breast, neck and head so uplifted as almost to hide its ears. And now came a revulsion of feeling. In a moment I was out of the churchyard, throwing whatever I could lay hands on at the poor animal.

Spring was nearing its close, when my ostler-friend died as the result of a kick by a mare. Unnoticed by any one, I was at his funeral, saw the coffin lowered into the grave, flung in a bunch of flowers that Betsy had made up for me, then went away to cry my fill in secret. His death was a bitter loss to me. Since then I have come to the conclusion that too many griefs can make the heart grow tough; too many joys must leave it half-

complete; but whatever be the action or the result, the latter is more due to the mental and psychological composition of the person than it ever can be either to the cause or its duration. And, just as in the dyer's art, Nature will allow true permanency to no greens but her own, so it is in trials of the heart—only those of real affection continue to swing true to the magnetic north of their own deeps.

During that summer my father took me to Scarborough for a week—my first remembered sight of blue salt water; and—well, a week could not sap a thousandth part of its romance. Naturally, all I wanted to make life complete was to be away there on the skyline. The repetition of my desire doubtlessly made me a nuisance, till there came the emphatic order that unless I stopped "worrying" I should go home by the next train. But what put a more effectual check on my aspirations was learning from divers big-booted men in sou'westers that a boy could not go to sea until he was twelve or fourteen years of age. I left Scarborough feeling that the life of a sailor was still a lifetime away from me.

Later on my father went on a visit to Blackpool (or Morecambe), and while he was away I yielded to a sudden desire to pay a visit to grandmother. It was harvest-time, the weather glorious, and my idea was that I would walk there on one day, return on the following one, and go easily both ways. To this Betsy did not mind. So, with plenty of buttered bread and some cold bacon in a paper bag, and, for the purpose of buying milk on the way, a shilling that had been extracted with a table-knife from my money-box—which father had previously compelled me to look on as a fixed institution, and to which I was forced to add threepence from every shilling that I earned or had given, for I was still the love-scribe of some young woman who could not write

—away I went, thinking of the time when I had covered those long, long miles three years before, and finding endless joy in the delicious freedom, countless small matters by the wayside, and the thought that I was once more a traveller on a big journey.

I had no difficulty in discovering the cottage. Grandmother was in the front garden, eliminating weeds, which were her abomination. Her first words were a query as to what I was doing there. Trouble had not softened her natural asperity. I answered that I had just walked over to see how she was in health. She at once announced a decided disbelief in such being my errand, and repeated her question, the while bidding me to tell the truth. My reply was an adherence to my former statement, coupled with a movement towards the house. I was followed by a rejoinder to "keep my itching fingers out of trouble and not meddle with that elderberry syrup in there." To her remark I ventured no answer; but entered the house, found myself the only being there, and made straight for the stone-floored and sanded kitchen. There, in a milk-bowl by the fender, I came upon what I sought—nor did its peculiar green and slimy hue and appearance set me back. Mahomet had reached the inconsiderate mountain, and he would make the best of his arrival. I had often heard the vaulting praises of grandmother's elderberry wine; but no one would ever give *me* a taste of it, nor had my taxed ingenuity brought me to that end. Now, however—— I stole across to the delft rack. The first thing to my hand was one of grandmother's aged and prized cups—I remember hearing that the set had been one of her mother's wedding presents. With it I hurried back to the bowl and half-filled it, regardless of the thick film on the surface of the liquid, and of the fact that it was apparently hot. Up to my lips I raised the coveted stuff in haste, took a gulp, yelled with pain, dropped the cup

in my extremity, saw the grievous sin I had committed; then left the house by its back way, just as I heard a warning cry from the front garden, and sped as if for very life across the fields, while unheeded commands and emphatic notes of vengeance floated from the rear of the house to me, fainter and fainter, as I fled.

That "syrup" was not syrup, but the raw liquor, more bitter than either gall or a quondam friend's treachery with one's wife; it was also hot enough to have skinned the greater part of my palate. By a circuitous route that came of some formerly acquired knowledge and the desperation of the moment I reached back to my way homewards and trudged off, in a mood to cut down every elder-tree in the country, and make faggots of them for the burning of all grandmothers who made "syrup" of elderberries. That I was tired, now really very tired, had more than six miles 'twixt me and home, wanted my tea, and regretfully eyed the drooping sun, made no jot of difference—go back to the scene of my crime I would not, dared not, though the pain in my mouth were forty times greater than it was. The two kings of Brentford had smelt one rose, but behind me there was now a foewoman who would bate me no ace in the feud here commenced. Disobedience was bad enough in the house that knew my grandmother's rule; but to break one of those cups!—I wished that I had stolen away in one of the Scarborough craft, and wondered if my money-box held enough to get me back there. It was certain that I would now have to be moving far away. Only tracts of land like prairies and savannahs or the wide ocean could keep my grandmother from the despoiler in such a case as this. And, on the whole, I had done *so well* of late!

At a farmhouse beyond the entrance to Sir Lionel Pilkington's park I bought a pint of milk and begged a bottle to carry it in. The cooling breeze of evening to the fallen wanderer of the desert and drops of rain on

the long-parched tongue of the tropical castaway were not, both in one, as that draught of milk to my skinless palate and scalded tongue. Before I had covered another half-mile my bottle was empty. In Walton I purchased another pint of milk, gave a penny for a larger bottle, had it filled also, and went on my way, sipping the cool liquid so often that my mouth was milky all the time. I wanted nothing to eat, and my pace was a saunter. So came sundown, when I stole into a harvest-field, built a sort of cave with sheaves, unbound some more to make me a bed and covering, then crept in, took another big drink of milk, and fell asleep forthwith—in a weariness that had a pain of its own.

When I awoke the sun was high, and the harvesters were at work. Two of them saw me crawl into evidence, fully awake (as my custom always was the moment my eyes opened from sleep), feeling pain in my mouth, but ravenously hungry. They came near, and began to rate me for casting the sheaves loose, asking at the same time what “vagabond young scamp” I was. Then they paused, looked at my clothes, and inquired from what school I had bolted. My reply was to push over my cave, saying, “Wait a bit”; then to ferret out my bottles, have a drink, bind up the sheaves afresh—showing that I could make both bands and sheaves—and finally say, when all was done, “There, isn’t that good enough?” Before this came about there were remarks on “the bairn having crept out of his nursery, but taken his bottle with him.” However, when I had restored matters to their former state and offered to do some work for some breakfast, a change came over them. Of course they wanted to know far more about me than I felt disposed to tell. There was the old idea in my head—tell nothing, and nothing can be done against you. In a few minutes I had my choice of bread and cheese, boiled bacon, a custard in a basin, some dried

oatcakes, milk and cold tea. But, alas! I was the humble Tantalus of the harvest-field. In all that offered feast I could get no farther than custard, and oatcakes soaked in milk! And all for being a little Adam, with a sanded kitchen for my Eden and a bowl of elderberry "syrup" for the apple-tree! Ye powers of retribution, what a punished sinner was I! Not half my woes were suffered by the friar who, for some apostolic crime, had to tramp to Rome with peas in his shoon, "much worse than gravel."

Between ten and eleven o'clock I ceased work and took to the road again, taking my smaller bottle full of milk, and with some five miles to cover ere I reached home. I had not been long on the way when the rattle of a light cart in my rear caused me to look hurriedly in its direction; this was over a dip in the road and across two hedges, the nearer one of which completely hid me by being quite close. About the figure in the cart there was something so suggestively familiar that I made all haste through a weak place in the hedge, ran to where it was thicker, and crouched down. Two or three minutes later up came the cart, and there, all too sure, sat my grandam, her taut little figure upright under a biggish bonnet, she driving hotfoot—in a borrowed vehicle—to find me at home, and with the vengeance of the gods in her wrinkled face. Had she known that I cowered behind that hedge, watching her go by—! Time, and that inevitable law of retaliation termed destiny, had given me the laughing position of her. But who could laugh when the expression of his opponent's face would "murder sleep"? It was some time before I ventured back to the road—and what an ever-uplifted eye was mine when I did so! How I hurried over the next two miles or so, in order to strike Heath Common, and have plenty of handy hiding-places amongst the furze, ere grandmother could return and

meet me! How I lingered at every crossing and by-road end beyond the Common, then did a jog-trot to the next one, or from one field-gate to another, so as to have a proper means of exit when the enemy appeared on my troubled horizon! And how I darted away to hide whenever I heard the sound of wheels coming from the direction of Normanton!—all the time so heedless of the slackening pain in my mouth as to take but two short pulls at my bottle. Then, towards two o'clock in the afternoon, along she came. I hid in time; and she went by, with that same Medusa stamp on her face. Poor grandam, I had broken one of her heirlooms, and now she had such a straw to break with me, that it would be but little worse even if I broke myself!

However, the longest of rivers runs to the sea somewhere; and this episode of the cup and the "syrup" came to an end, but not before it had occasioned me divers sad happenings—the first being a painful interview with my father, when he returned home and found a missive awaiting him from his mother. Again was my pocket-money curtailed, and the box of my savings was never afterwards allowed to be at large. Again I took a canter down the road Avernus, and might have gone farther towards that hopeless gate at the end had it not been for Betsy, my Irish friend, and Naughton's two children. During this period I was less than half my time at school, for the greater part of it went amongst the spare ponies for the mines. So came winter, the mightiest bonfire that I can remember, a re-forming and re-starting of my reading-club by the men; then Christmas, when I played the hero of "The Peace Egg," St. George, strutting in spangles and plate-armour made of new tin, and valiantly slaying all my enemies. My share of the box-collections that year was fourteen shillings and sevenpence, to which father added another fivepence, then promptly confiscated five shillings to go to my

savings and five for clothes, saying "it was high time for me to learn that there were other purposes for money besides buying things to read, and that I was quickly drawing near the end of my wild tether." With the other five shillings I could do as I pleased—providing that I consulted him before I did anything.

It was out of this money that I immediately became acquainted with Fenimore Cooper, and went the whole gamut of him, as though I were a veritable dog-fiend on the trail of the worst Redskin that ever breathed. Worse still, it led me to one of the wildest escapades of those graceless early years. The big herd of ponies which were kept to be broken and sent into the mines as required, ran free in a very long, narrow field between the pits and the village; and it became my custom to go there on dark nights, catch one of a group that stood motionless by the hedge, and leap on to its back before it could break away. Then, with breast low down on the pony's shoulders, both hands at first twisted in its shaggy mane, its long tail streaming out like a pennant behind, the poor thing half-frightened out of its wits, and me clinging as a monkey to a whirligig, away we tore up and down the field till the pony could run no more. During these wild flights I would now and then flash a tomahawk that I had fashioned out of wood and silver-paper, and was carried in my teeth when first mounting. But by-and-by I was seen, chased, and almost caught by one of the mining officials. A few weeks later I returned to my sport of hunting Redskins, but so late at night that the village was in darkness. To this, however, Betsy offered such objections, on the score of my keeping her out of bed till she was "fair knocked up," that once more I had to make a change; and this was where I began to practise that duplicity which had been taught to me by the gin-drinking house-keeper and the young woman with the three sweethearts.

I pretended to give up the game and went to bed at proper time. Then, when I thought that Betsy must be safely asleep, I passed out of my window, down two slanting clothes-props—previously placed in readiness—and away to my midnight scalping-ground. By the time this procedure was in good working-order the inconsiderate moon came up and spoilt it all. And when I renewed the game a fortnight later, it was to find Betsy running into my room in her nightdress and with a swaling candle, as I went through the open window, the tomahawk between my teeth and a horde of imaginary Indians at my heels; she crying that she had just been frightened with noises and dreaming of burglars, after being kept awake with toothache. And now she was more scared than ever by seeing me return, from she knew not where, in such a burglarious manner, and at an hour when “all honest folk should be in bed an’ thieves an’ rogues abaat the’r business.” Finally, what could a lad do but give up his sport to please so great a friend?—even though she would affirm that “all them books would make me as silly an’ softy as the’rselves.”

However, spring was already flinging her wanton attractions around, and my share of them was always a large one, though quite different from that of my elders. Then, just as all things were running as smoothly as ever they did, calamity came my way again. This was in the guise of a change in the assistant-mastership at school. It was under him that I sat, suffered, and was sad. From the very first, and for some reason that has always been a mystery to me, I was his *bête noir*. Do what I would and do it how I might, I could do nothing to please him. As for my playing the hare of artifice to his hound of dislike, that was impossible; I was still too much of the simple savage—the child of the field, the high road and the hedgerow. I had but three stages of feeling—where I loved I must serve; where I disliked I

must keep aloof; where I hated I must strike. But I had left some of my promiscuous savagery behind on the thorn-strewn road of experience. And here I honestly strove a while to propitiate this new mischance in the uneven tenor of my existence. When this failed, I held aloof by taking to my former gipsying during the greater part of the week; and when at length the load became too heavy for me to carry, I threw it off by striking. This was in school, and I could write pages of biting detail on what took place; but enough. That dark-skinned, hollow-chested, small-eyed, slight young man under medium height, with his black hair parted in the middle and always kept flat as if waxed down, was no match for the wiry, healthy lad with uncommon staying-powers and the unschooled passion of a fury. Had it not been for the rush of numbers—the head-master being out at the time—Heaven only could tell what would have happened. Then it was—when the master came in—that I, sullen, mauled, desperate, and apparently damned, was introduced by many hands to the wooden horse, and the birch that had dangled so long and threateningly from its neck. The coming of this had been a Narrowdale noon, indeed. Now it had come; and I went forth, as a sensitive criminal from the dock, branded with the stigma of an indignity that was irreparable to me, and never again to be seen inside that school.

When it subsequently came to me to read the stories of Eugene Aram and Dotheboys Hall, and memory opened wide her chambers sealed of yore, I could not avoid seeing in that assistant-master a personification of the two. More than all the former evil influences, the gin-drinker perhaps excepted, I put him down as being the cause of all the untowardness that came into my life during the next few years. To tell it briefly, all that summer went in social and moral outlawry—such as could be committed by a boy of ten and a half years—

and in bouts of physical pain that did but serve as lifts on the downward road. Two more helps in this direction were the sudden disappearance of my old Irish friend, who went without notice no one knew whither, and never came back, and the Naughtons going to live at some place beyond Leeds. These bereavements made me desolate. Even then unkind fate had not done with me. Betsy suddenly and unexpectedly left us to be married. All these four mishaps came within as many months; and a fifth arrived immediately, in the guise of a too readily obtained housekeeper who, although far better than the other two had been, was quite unacceptable—to me—as a successor to Betsy. Now, indeed, was my cup of bitters full, and again came the old impulse to go to Mary's grave. The winter of my discontent had come back with renewed force; and, naturally, the resultant upsets between my father and me formed an ever-recurring note in the general discord. This led to continual absences from home, and to my acquiring a sort of graveyard snuggery. The latter was one of those big, box-like structures, about six feet long, three feet wide, and a couple of feet high, the top being one slab of stone. I was caught in a heavy shower of rain whilst crossing the lower part of the churchyard, and, seeing that the foot of this monument was broken away, in I crept, and many a time thereafter did it prove to be of service to me in the same way. In fact, I grew to look on the place as "My Cave," and even went so far as to smuggle into it a dry-soap box for the purpose of keeping a few spare books there, a little bag of marbles, and some sewing gear with which to replace my trouser-buttons, this matter having become a large source of friction between the new housekeeper and me. When winter came I contrived to get some old cocoanut-matting into the place. Had I been a smoker I should doubtlessly have smoked whilst I read, with no more

thought of desecration than of Doomsday. Finally, having carried my store of marbles—a bagful about the size of a small pillow-slip—as a gift to little Tom, and curiously feeling that I was saying a last good-bye to things and places there, I left home again and tramped to Barnsley—leaving the brown-lustre mug behind, lest I should break the treasure, but stuffing my pockets with books. Thence to the following spring “the rolling stone that would never gather any moss” spent a few weeks here and there, till he had but one uncle in the town who would give him house-room. And “it was all that reading, that and his father’s bad management,” which were to blame. So, with painful reiteration, ran the opinions of aunts. Then one of them curiously came upon an account of an infamous criminal whose biography had been printed, and bound in his own skin after he was hanged. This was held up to me as a most terrible and opportune warning. But my interest centred in the mere gruesome appropriateness of the thing, and for this I was put down to be irretrievably past all power of reclamation.

It was there, early in the following spring, that I went through the horrors of a first smoke. Having secured the materials—just how and what led up to the affair do not matter—I went into the toolshed at the bottom of the garden and lit up, my first puff being one of the largest and happiest I ever drew from a pipe. But an unseen and thereto undreamt-of Nemesis lurked in that black and over-seasoned bowl. The puffs grew less, each successive one causing a greater commotion in my inwards. Within ten minutes after lighting the weed, I felt as I have never felt since. Not all the legions of sickness in general could have made me feel worse. It was as if I had suddenly contracted a complaint formed of every species of known and unknown fever, all held in the bonds of *mal de mer* and fighting

to be free. I became dizzy, flung the pipe into a far corner, staggered outside, limp and seeming about to fall to pieces. My jaws suffered under a curious lassitude, the lower one hung down; my eyes swam, and each limb was filled with inertia. Then down I went. Chastisement to the wrong-doer is one of the fundamental laws of Nature, and here I realized that fact as I had never done before. When I came to myself I was indoors, still feeling and looking livid and greenish. Quickly was I stripped, given a *hot* bath, then whisked into heated blankets. Other aunts had arrived, and the opinions amongst them were divided between measles, scarlet fever, chicken-pox, and my having eaten "something bad." But as the majority were for measles—especially as I had never been visited by an infantile ailment—such was the treatment accorded to me. However, the following day found me fit to be out again—not that I was allowed such liberty so soon, for the final result of my first pipe was a couple of days' attentive feeding-up. A week or so later my Uncle Will found the pipe, did a little deductive reasoning, apparently, taxed me with what had occurred, and so enjoyed the "measles" joke that he told the other uncles, but kept it from the aunts till long afterwards.

A month or so subsequent to this affair I set off for home—under the pressing necessity of moving camp to somewhere—passed the end of the road to Mapplewell, thinking of the dumplings, the mutton broth and the nail-making, and reached Newmillerdam too late to continue on to Normanton that night. Time had healed the feud between me and grandam—on my side, at any rate, and there I guided my footsteps—feeling that I was now too nearly grown-up to take much notice of Aunt S——'s vagaries. Besides, a visit to Mary's grave and I would be off again on the morrow—but I wasn't. An unexpectedly peaceful reception led to the pilgrim indefinitely

putting off the breaking up of his bivouac by the way. Then the old lady put her finger into the pie, which usually spelt some ferment—either I must go to school or to work in the fields. Idle my time away there with young ragamuffins I should not. I could make my choice between the two courses, or be moving again. Well, I was comfortable; I would rather work than go to school. So to work I went, and discovered later on that this ultimatum was due to letters which had passed between my father and grandmother. My work was first in harvest-fields; and in connection with it, largely owing to my getting possession of a natural history story named "Inquisitive Jack," I saw such things as a rat leading a blind companion to drink by the means of a straw, each rat having an end of it in his mouth; two buck-rabbits fighting, whilst half-a-dozen females squatted around watching the battle, and the combatants now and then going ten to fifteen feet into the air as the result of a furious mutual charge; and of a stoat (or a weasel—the former, I believe) fascinating a rabbit by performing strange and wonderful antics that took it slowly nearer and nearer to poor bunny, on to which it finally jumped. In a few minutes the rabbit was dead.

Then came the old regime of day-work and night-lessons, till I revolted, paid a farewell call at the little grave on the hill-top, and moved my shifting camp home again. A Mrs. Robinson was then in charge of the domicile, and if she was not quite so acceptable as Betsy had been, she had at least all the qualities of good influence. Still, apparently, the racket had to be run. My unquiet spirit could not rest. The parents of little Tom had gone far away, and there was not a friend within reach. A year passed away, a year as full of changes and penalties as others of my acquaintance; then one morning, being deep in trouble, and immediately after my coming upon a locket in father's room,

containing portraits of my mother and baby-sister, and having the words "Joseph and Mary" over clasped hands—which gave me a curious shock—I surreptitiously packed a bundle of clothes and left home. This time I took Mary's mug with me, and my steps were pointed in quite a new direction. I went to Pontefract (locally Pomfriët) with eleven shillings odd which I had saved, intending to accumulate a pound, then make my way to London. There—saying everywhere that my age was twelve and a half years and that I was an orphan—I obtained lodgings in a house which must in bygone times have been a part of some large building, for the walls were some two feet thick, and often I sat cuddled up in a corner of the inner sill of the window reading by the dying light of day. Here I speedily obtained work in a coal-mine, getting twelve shillings per week as a trap-door boy, and paying nine for my board and lodgings. Of course the history of the place greatly interested me, and led to some reading. Amongst other books read there were "The Sorrows of Werther" and several of Lytton's novels, all of which left lasting effects on my mind; while "Eugene Aram" sent me back, mentally, to the black-haired assistant-master at Normanton school. Apropos this matter, on one Saturday afternoon I went to Leeds with a youthful acquaintance for the purpose of visiting the theatre. But when we arrived there I left him and found my way to Kirkstall, because I had heard my father say that the abbey ruins were the scene of "Mary, the Maid of the Inn." It was partially due to this affair and to the old ballad that I won a wager of half-a-crown by taking a marked stone at midnight to a certain four cross roads where a suicide was reputed to have been buried without priest, clerk, bell or taper, and with a stake driven through his breast and standing far above the ground. This night was said to be the anniversary of his burial, when he was supposed to visit the

scene—and, the humorous unbelieving said, lean against the ghost of the stake whilst he read the funeral service over himself.

Whether or not any search was made for me during this time I cannot say. Nothing occurred to interrupt the smooth running of things—except now and then, when some of us boys were nearly caught for orchard-robbing or tearing up liquorice roots, which were grown extensively about there. My closest shave personally was when, during the “church parade” on a Sunday evening, I threw the half of a stolen pear at a silk hat, hit it, was chased, got away, and afterwards learnt that the wearer of the “chimney-pot” was the Chief Constable.

After about five months at the trap-door (which was a heavy affair across a roadway, for the purpose of turning a current of air, and was hauled open by a cord, while I sat in a small box-like place hewn in the solid coal), I was promoted to the driving of a pony on night-shift, and had my wages increased to fifteen shillings weekly, a part of which was regularly saved. Soon after this change death again gave me a sort of gentle rap on the knuckles. The men with whom my time was spent were not workers at the coal-face, but what were known as day-men—*i. e.* they were paid by time, and not by “the piece,” and their labour was to repair roadways and workings where traffic had put matters out of order, or the top had come down. And one night, when they were clearing a fouled working, while I idled about, waiting for the “tub” (small wagon) to be filled, one of them told me repeatedly not to venture so far into the place. This warning I as often forgot; and presently, when I had sidled past them and stood in doubt whether to go farther or not, there was a sudden crack, and down, within some two feet of my face, came several tons of the roof. The back-wind and the dust nearly

choked me. Where I was I hardly knew at the moment ; but the calls of anxious men quickly fetched me out of danger. Then, as I had felt when sitting and panting on the bank of the brickyard pond, there was again that curious sensation of being near the hand that was placed on my head in the cellar.

How long I should have remained there it is impossible to say. The end came in this manner. On my arrival at the pit-head between five and six o'clock one Monday morning I met a man who had been an underground "deputy" at the Normanton mines. He recognized me, asked if my father knew my whereabouts, and said that he would at once send him word. This was enough. I had fared too long and too well at the board of freedom to think of going back to leading-strings and I knew not what else. I went hurriedly to my lodgings, had the usual bath and breakfast, but did not go to bed. Most of the morning was expended in debating the situation. Of late I had read more of Marryat and of the sea generally. My possessions amounted to three pounds odd, a good suit of clothes, some inferior ones, and a few books. I had read so much of Hull that the place seemed to be known to me ; besides, being the port from which Crusoe first shipped, it was the ideal one for me. At noon my scot was paid to the landlady—whom I was very loth to leave—sixpence was spent in a doll for her little girl, my effects were moved in two bundles to the railway-station, and I was away for the ancient borough of Hull and "life on the rolling deep" still with Mary's mug as my most treasured possession. During ten months I had fought the tragic battle of life, thinking what a fine comedy it was. Now I would see it on a far greater stage, little dreaming what a tragedy it was to become at the farther end of that road which I then began to travel.

PHASE TWO :

THE LIFE ADVENTUROUS.

*" . . . Hang consideration !
When this is spent is not our ship the same,
Our courage too the same, to fetch in more ?*

. . . The sea, which is our mother——

*Yields every day a crop if we dare reap it.
No, no, my mates, let tradesmen think of thrift,
And usurers hoard up."*

MASSINGER.

*"Who hath not known ill fortune, never knew
Himself, or his own virtue."*

MALLET.

*"Adversity then is not so heavily to be taken, and we ought not in
such cases so much to macerate ourselves."—BURTON.*

CHAPTER I

Orgon at large—On board the *Martha*—A sailor-boy—Tar and a trick—"Want a ship?"—Dramatic criticism—Police to the rescue—A kerbstone supper—A dock-side night attack—A cold plunge—"Old Shells"—An inquisitive she—A bundle of books—On the deep rolling tide—Under-handed work—Back to England—Taken home.

FROM the railway-station, where my bundles were left, I made all haste to the docks, as if I were going to sea on the next tide, took a short roam around, then I entered the first coffee-house I could find, and found it half-full of fishermen and sailors. Having edged my way near the bar, I openly said to the woman on the other side—

"Can I stop here to-night?"

"Stop here," echoed she indifferently, and scrutinizing me well.

"Yes," I rejoined in a tone unintentionally loud enough to be heard by all present. "Can I have a bed here?—I can pay for it as long as I stop, because I'm going to sea soon." At this the woman became more of a true caterer, but observed that I must pay in advance. Without the least hesitation, and in the midst of her explanations as to why the forward payment, I stepped to the counter and put down my sovereign.

For several minutes past I had been the object of every eye—my small figure (made to seem more sturdy by the extra suit), clear skin though ruddy cheeks, clustering bright brown hair, and so marked a lack of reserve in speech and manner had plainly proclaimed me to them for what I was. But the appearance of the pound-piece was as the clenching of a nail. I had run

away from home; beyond that the outer lad and the coin led them considerably astray.

While the bar-attendant was giving me change (and, to do her justice, she was passably honest; she took only eighteenpence for my shilling-bed) some of those around began to talk to me. Nothing loth, I replied—so be that their remarks and queries did not trend toward Normanton. The old idea of keeping this secret was as emphatic as ever.

On looking back at the occasion I now see that by a chance and happy combination of answers I made my jesters and inquirers think me not only the architect of my fortunes, but one as able to build as to plan them. Alas! for the charlatanism of youth. Yet I had not deceived them all. There was one battered elderly salt, sitting apart and smoking a short black clay, who had watched and listened in silence.

"Here, youngster," said he, as I passed him on my way out.

"What do you want?" I asked, instantly disliking his half-secret manner. He replied that he wished to speak to me; but with the true seaman's lack of tact he had foiled his own object. In addition to this, the others—some laughingly, some sneeringly—advised me to "take no notice of Old Shells." This I did, and left the place—to regret it afterwards. (In those days, and long afterwards, it was one of my prominent misfortunes to consider would-be friends as enemies, and to give to secret foes the treatment that should be given to the former. This I have noticed to be one of the unfailing traits of those peculiarly unreserved minds and temperaments which can never be prosaic, beyond an occasional spurt into the practical.)

On regaining the open air I made directly for the nearest dock-side. In this I was fortunate; for it happened to be a dock chiefly containing coasting craft.

Had I gone to one with larger vessels in it, my chances of securing employment would have been much less. Presently I came to where a small schooner was moored to the quay-side. With the exception of a boy, about my own age, cleansing a saucepan by the diminutive galley door, and a man splicing a rope on an adjacent hatch, she seemed to have no crew. After watching the boy for a few minutes I clambered on board, and engaged him in conversation. In a very brief time we were as two who had known each other since childhood. (An undisputable proof that we are not born with the instinct of higher civilization is that as boys we are much nearer the savage than we are as men. With men, friendships are the result of years of intercourse; with boys, and other savages of the better kind, they take instant root, and attain vigour on the occasion of their birth.) Not satisfied with talking to the boy, I—under his directions, and not then thinking of where it would end, or of going farther and looking out a ship for myself—was as busy in his work as though it were mine and I anxious to get it done. While this was in progress the man on the hatch began to talk to me; I answered him, and when the kitchen business was finished, I asked if I could be of any use to him. He said I could, and smilingly told me to tar some strips of canvas that lay by his side. Behind him were two pots of tar, and I inquired, "This one?" pointing to the blacker of the two.

"Yes," he replied, without looking which I meant. My two jackets had been previously put aside and my shirt-sleeves rolled up; thus, while the boy went to do some work in the cabin, I plunged my hands into the tar and began on the new task—secretly thinking that I must surely then be a sailor. About three minutes later a youth appeared from the hold, glanced at me, and said—

"What are you doin', you fool?" Then he added to the man, "Jim, do you see he's *coal-tarring* them strips?"

Jim—whom I afterwards discovered to be the mate—turned round, growled at me, and remarked on the foolishness of setting a novice to do a thing without watching him. I explained that the fault was not mine; to which he readily assented, and bade me put some of the brown tar on the clean strips.

"Hold on a minute," interposed the other. "Just you dab your nose-end, like this (imitating the manner in which he desired me to mark myself), an' both sides your fore'ead—so. An' see how they feel as if they'd all come together."

He saw my doubting, questioning look, earnestly assured me that there was no trick in the matter, and—ever eager to learn anything new to me—I did as required. No sooner had I done it, and while awaiting the promised peculiar sensation, than he gave vent to a loud guffaw; then pointed at my face and called me an idiot. Scarcely were the words out of his mouth, when I was by his side. Before he had divined the intent, my outspread hand, thick with tar, was flattened on his face. His lips received a share. He sputtered, overcame his surprise, and made a vindictive rush at me. But Jim stepped between us, said that my action served him right, and bade him go about his work.

Then, under my new friend's guidance, I cleansed the tar off my face, and continued with the work in hand. When I was finishing the task, the skipper came from the cabin—though I did not then know him to be that person.

"Hullo," said he, "who are you?"

"Cedric Peters," was my quiet answer.

"And who the devil's Cedric Peters?"

"His father's son," I replied.

To this he gave a loud laugh, swore, said I was "a queer 'un," and asked me what I was working there for.

"Because I like it," I rejoined, not pausing even to look at him.

"And do you of'en work because you like it?"

"Yes—when I like it." Again he swore, and wanted to know where I came from. I would not tell him, then he questioned my reason for being in Hull.

"To go to sea," said I simply. Had I run away from prison?—No. Had I friends in Hull?—No. Would I go to sea with him? "In what?" I asked.

"This schooner, of course,—what the devil do you think, boy. Or do you want a yacht to begin with?" No, I did not want a yacht; I would go with him, and I inquired what wages he would give me. This made him laugh again; after which he offered me ten shillings for the first month, and more later on if I proved as good as I seemed.

Thus was the bargain made; then, after cleansing my hands, I accompanied the boy into the cabin—where I learnt that the bully bore the name of "Skulks," and I first made the acquaintance of "Nelson," the retriever, he and I (according to my common custom with dogs) being at once on good terms. Meanwhile, Jim—as I heard later on—told the skipper of my affair with "Skulks."

From that moment the schooner's galley-boy and I were as Damon and Pythias. When we stepped ashore that evening, I asked, "Where are you going?"

"Oh, you'll see," was his answer. "You come along wi' me—I've got a 'tanner,' an' I knows a fine tup'ny 'gaff' w're they does a murder every night, an' the girl shrieks like mad when they run away with 'er!"

Tom was naturally a kind lad, and I have often, since then, felt sorry that his general abilities were so far beneath his intentions. The "gaff" was not enticing. I had a more attractive programme in mind, and led

him off to the coffee-house where I had paid for a bed. There I told the woman that I should be coming to occupy my room for the night; but should not need it afterwards, as I had already secured a ship. There were present some of those who had quizzed me on arrival, and I noticed their significant looks.

When we were outside, Tom said, "Wot do you want to go sleepin' there for, w'en you can come aboard?"

"Because I've paid for it."—"Oh, that's different!"—"And I want to clean out that bunk before I sleep in it," I added, whereat he gazed at me in wonderment during some minutes of silence.

We were half-unconsciously working back towards the schooner. Darkness was closing in, and I asked him to show the way to the Theatre Royal—a name I had seen on placards.

"W'y," said he, "it's *sixpence in the ' gods '!*"

"Never mind, let us go."

"All right—if *you've* got the coin."

"I shouldn't ask you to come if I hadn't," was my answer, and he began to apply personal queries; but I wished to learn, also that he should not—on those topics—and I stormed him with a host of questions on life at sea.

Thus was his mind engaged until we arrived at the theatre. There I marched straight into the pit-entrance—he mute and gaping at my action—put a florin on the sill of the ticket-box, and said, "Two, please." As we threaded the passage to the auditorium, Tom put his ruddy, good-looking face close to my shoulder, grinned, and whispered, "W'ere've you got the money—stole it?"

"No," I simply replied, and we pushed our way along one of the benches. Tom was the only one with whom I could not be angry at such an insinuation.

I sat on Tom's left, and soon there came on mine a

youth who had tried his beggar-wit on me, when we left the coffee-house. With him was a girl of his kind. His glance proved recognition and some disdain. Presently he began to crowd on me so that his companion could see clear of a large bonnet in front of her. This I resented, and trouble threatened; but passed off owing to the sudden making of a gap in the backless bench-seat in front of us, and their getting into it.

At length the curtain went up, and descended again on "The Green Bushes of the Far West." Then came the act in which the old tar sits quietly by, while his companion almost empties the liquor bottle. To my preconceived notions of weather-barnacled "salts," this appealed as being wholly untrue to life, and when the non-critical applause died away I said to Tom, "That isn't right, I know. No sailor would let another man drink all the grog in that manner."

The youth in front had just bought two oranges. The smaller one he had given to the girl; the other he was peeling, as he turned to me and remarked, "Wot the devil do yo' know about sailors?"

Apart from his East Riding twang, and my instilled idea that persons of his age were hopelessly evil if they used such words as "devil," I stiffened at the tone he employed, and replied, "More than you can teach me;" for which I received a vigorous, "Rot!" But I marked that his manner was much weaker than his tone, and that his eyes drooped while turning his head as he spoke. The next minute over his right shoulder and slap in my face came a piece of orange peel.

"Whiskers!" said Tom, whose one chief trait was the picking up and retaining of by-words.

My answer was the hardest blow I could plant behind the youth's ear. It sent him forward. Then I stooped as well as the space would allow and seized his legs in my curved arm beneath the seat. Thus holding him a

prisoner and leaning forward, he gripping the seat in front with both hands to prevent his going down altogether, I pounded the side of his face to the best of my small ability, but to the full of my strength and satisfaction. At the same time his companion applied all her powers to my face, and to do her justice she did not scratch; but for every smack she gave, and they were not light ones, my fist fell with treble their weight on the jaw and cheek of her lover. Meantime, from the little crowd standing on the seats around us came such cries as, "Go it, youngster!" "Well done, Billycock!"—in reference to my hat held by Tom. "Let 'im get up, Curly-toppin'!" "Smack his face, lass!—smack into 'im!" Then a constable waded in; and I, in the midst of sudden quietude, felt myself carried out by the nape of my neck, as a terrier might carry a half-grown rat.

Once clear of the seats my bearer put me down and made inquiries. Several of the spectators offered their testimony; amongst them were the youth and his girl—both of them being a good head taller than I was. But my captor waved them aside, and evidently gave all belief to my version of the happening. (I must admit that Nature had blessed me with an engagingly frank countenance, probably as an avenue of escape from the troubles she had caused me in other ways; for the jade has ever the better of the bargain.) The constable made the people sit down, and found Tom and me a seat on the end of a bench near the door and himself.

Just before the play finished the policeman came over and quietly advised us to be moving, before my enemy contrived to gather his comrades in the interest of my ill-health. With this Tom concurred, and we went quietly forth. The November night was cold, and from a man in the gutter before the house I bought two great, freshly-roasted potatoes. One I gave to Tom; we

each secured some salt and left the place, eating as we went. By the railway-station stood a man selling hot pies, and fourpence of my money purchased two of them—Tom agreeing with me that while I had so much wealth we had better keep his silver piece intact. Thence we chanced along to Mytongate—my chum knowing but little more of the town than I—into King William Street, and back to the dock-side within sight of my resting-place for the night.

Here we had resolved to part, he to go on board, me to the coffee-house before it closed, and join him at seven o'clock in the morning. While arranging for him to account to the mate concerning my absence, if asked for, two youths appeared around the corner of an adjacent warehouse and drew near. Close by a gas-lamp gave out its sickly glare, and as the strangers passed us we saw that one of them was my late opponent.

"W'y, *here's* the little devil, Bill," said he to the other, as I, to watch them, turned my face towards the light. The next instant he had sprung at me. But I had learnt many tricks of warfare owing to cruel fortune often pitting me against heavier lads. At the moment of his rush I doubled up, low down in his shadow—the lamp being behind him—and threw myself bodily, shoulders first, against his legs! With a spluttered oath he went over me, his face making a disfiguring acquaintance with the stones in the quay, and I straightened up like a Jack-in-the-box—to go down again, ere I had time to look around, under a blow from his companion. Then, before they could do further mischief, Tom's lungs rent the night air with a yell of "Murder!"

On this came a hurried patter of footsteps. A scrambling rush was made by the two young dock-loafers; and, tripping over a line on a bollard by the quay-side, the one who had knocked me down went head-foremost into the dock. By this time I, feeling

rather dazed from the stinging blow, was on my feet again—just in time to see an elderly man arrive on the scene and, with Tom and my former opponent, hurry to the edge of the quay. In the past I had known occasions on which to be proud of my swimming. Now, every vestige of resentment gone at the thought of death, I quickly joined them—tearing off and dropping my jacket as I went. At that moment the immersed one came to the surface, splashed about—seemingly with some idea of swimming—and vented a gurgling cry for help. When I was in the act of springing in, the man put his hand on my shoulder and said, “Here, better than that.—Down on your stomach, lad! Here, you” (to Tom), “catch ’old of his other leg!”

I understood, with the ready perception one has only at such times, and slid over the quay-edge, while he and Tom held me by the ankles. With outstretched hands I reached the struggling and almost sinking youth—getting a firm grip on his hair with one hand, the other finding a like hold in the neck of his clothing. Thus we were both dragged back to safety—as I was to be hauled back in later years and much greater danger.

Then I turned to look for my jacket; but it was gone, and with it my first assailant. To show this there needed no more than a minute. At the end of it a constable appeared, and Tom, still frightened, immediately blurted out what had taken place. The shivering, dripping youth cowered under the light of the new-comer’s lamp, and began to blunder out an excuse on the assertion that I was the first aggressor! But the policeman said he knew him and some of his former doings, for which reason he should lock him up. Then the other man spoke in my favour, and I recognized him to be Old Shells. Yet I liked not the idea of the youth being further punished. He had received enough of that, I thought. So I begged him out of the law’s hands, and

saw him scurry off. Prison had always been the one thing *I* feared, and we too often judge others by ourselves.

When the constable had gone to look for my jacket, and Tom had hurried away to the schooner, Old Shells so talked to me, particularly of the life to which I had come, that from the moment of our parting to the one of his death I scarcely knew whether my love or respect for him was the greater feeling. This I know: The things he taught me rank amongst the best I ever learnt, and life has no better to teach. The kindest turn that fortune did for me in those days was my acquaintance with Old Shells.

I had a crown-piece in my pocket, and as he was turning away by the door of the coffee-house I thrust it into his hand. (This is mentioned for a subsequent reason that will serve as a true keynote to the character of my new friend.) I could see that he greatly needed it; but to make him accept it required all my powers of persuasion and assurance that I had "plenty more." At length, with a look at the house—which I afterwards understood—then at me, he took the coin, said "Good-night," and was gone. I, shivering for the lack of my jacket, entered the place and found that instead of the room I had expected I was shown, by a loose-tongued and broad-hipped slattern a year or two my senior, to one of three narrow beds in a room no larger than the one I had rented at Pontefract. The other beds were empty; hence her reason for telling me not to "put anything against the door," and seeing that it had no lock or bolt I grasped her meaning. After a needlessly prolonged stay and several unappreciated and barely understood remarks on myself, she left the room, and me about an inch of candle—probably disgusted, in her way, at my country density. Being tired and sleepy, I quickly undressed, knotted my money in the tail of my shirt,

and sprang in between what I most disliked in the house—the dirty sheets.

The next morning saw me at my duties, quite fresh and alert enough to keep the mate in sympathy with me and on my side against "Skulks"; otherwise there would have been trouble between the latter and me. My jacket was gone for ever, so far as could be ascertained.¹ That evening I fetched my bundles from the station. Thus two days went by; then, on the evening of the day before we sailed, I lugged on board an armful of old books, bought for two shillings and threepence at a second-hand bookshop in Mytongate—to the speechlessness of my new chum, who had not borne me company on that expedition, as he did when I went to buy a suit of oil-skins and a pair of "half-Wellingtons." At the moment there was still sufficient daylight for the master and his mate—who stood on the after-deck talking together—to see me, as I went over the gangway, my bundle of dilapidated literature held together with oddments of string. Of course there were telling glances between them, and there the matter ended outwardly, except for the mate's remark about an hour later, that I "seemed to have brought all the class's books with me." Amongst them were "The Cid," "The Antiquary," "Roland of Roncesvallës," a big book on the romance of history, "The Æneid," "Paul and Virginia," and some translations of Eastern tales which the man of forgotten literature threw in for threepence and with the assurance that they would please me. To me my bundle was as the raking of gold from a dust-heap; but if I had known that it was immediately to start the way home for me, I should have made my first voyage without books—dearly as I loved them.

¹ As to the assumed name, I told every one that I was called Ked (short for Cedric) at home; and the sound of this being so much like "Ted" no mistakes were made.

Near the top of next morning's flood-tide we put to sea. Not too lightly to dismiss that initial voyage; it was quite an ordinary affair, as coasting voyages go. No *mal de mer* troubled me. On the whole the weather was kind, with a fine southerly breeze that helped us down the Humber, past Grimsby, around Spurn Point, and gave us a run up north. The work was a pleasure to me; the rolling sea was a greater delight; it seemed to become very familiar as the schooner—rather old and none too clean, but such a shapely and graceful bird of passage to me—ran past Scarborough. We were never out of sight of land or land-lights, excepting when crossing the mouth of the Forth. The mate, who told me the names of the running and standing gear, etc., and was pleased that I didn't have to be told twice, kept "Skulks" in his place; had such not been the case Tom and I would have put into operation a mightily conceived plan to the same end. Beyond the idea that "I would like to be over the hill there"—the seaward horizon, and so out of sight of land—one of my chief thoughts was of Crusoe's first voyage along the southern part of this east coast. Of home and such kindred matters I thought but little; now a real traveller, with all the world open to me—a new Aladdin in the cave of unguessed realities, with the wondrous jewels of fresh experiences sparkling all around me and feeling myself quite capable of a glorious examination of all there was in the cave, I was far too happy to be troubled by either dwelling on the past or looking doubtfully to the future. Youth alone can afford to make mistakes, for to it only will life give time and occasions for correction.

In Fraserburgh, whither we were bound with salt, I found that enjoyment which a healthy lad finds in every strange place. But matters were working against my happiness. During my first evening on shore, the master and the mate made a thorough examination of

all my effects. They found my proper name and the address of my lodgings scrawled in two or three books which I had carried away from Pontefract and half-forgotten; and, to go before my story, there the master wrote concerning me. In the interval, the "deputy," who saw me on the pit-head and caused my flight to fresher woods and newer pastures, had written to my father, bringing the latter over from Normanton to discover my lodgings and me gone. So that when the master's letter arrived at Pontefract, it was forwarded home. The post brought a reply, and our master answered. After eight days in Fraserburgh we went, in ballast, to Sunderland, to load coal for a French port in the Channel. But my great anticipation of really going abroad, of seeing "Mons. Crapaud" (as old books had taught me to think of him) at home, became forthwith as the glorious first half of a spring day, when the wind shifts and a miserable, cold rain sets in at noon. On our second day in dock my father walked on board. That evening saw me back at Normanton, at the cost of the remainder of those savings, which my father took from me—a hero of adventure in the eyes of some of my acquaintances; a captured, conquered and insignificant person to others; a returned source of mischievous annoyance to a few, at least; and, to myself, a temporarily cast-down, humiliated, little incarnation of smouldering revolt, which was made all the more intense by my father going piecemeal through my effects, and consigning every book of the sea and adventure, along with the brown-lustre mug, to "lock-and-key."

CHAPTER II

New trouble—A great battle—Mining again—A deep-sea fisher-boy—
Life on the Dogger Bank—Lost overboard—The hand from the
cellar—Smuggling—Home, redeemed—A poor reception—Away,
sad-hearted—Reading matter—Beginning to write—Shaving a
delirious man—A visit from my father—Two strange dreams—
Homeless.

OUR national poet and others have noted that the course of true love never did run smooth; but the course of wayward inclinations was ever a more turbulent stream, and the truth of this was soon driven in on me again. On the very day after my return home I chanced to go to my father's dressing-table, and there saw once more the locket inscribed "Joseph and Mary." With the same strange feeling of repugnance that had come to me on my first seeing the trinket and those words, I swung out of the room, went down-stairs, and straight into trouble with the housekeeper. Between her and me a mutual dislike had sprung up within an hour of my arrival home. Of course, this led to further trouble on my father's return later in the day. I was "no sooner in the house than making mischief and causing disturbances," and in that castigation there came some payment for the recent "bolting." Well, it was all proper and quite right; but not so to my notions then. And into the middle of the village I went, smarting under all the wrongs in Christendom, and so physically painful that I cared not how much more of the same kind came along—so be that I could retaliate. Aunt S—— had often told me that Satan was always finding mischief for idle hands to do. He certainly came to my help on that occasion. In the high road I found a group of boys, with the

recognized bully at a little distance. They were badgering him on a recent action of his towards the beauty of that part of the village—one on whom I had often spent pennies. He dared not attack the group, but was offering to fight any two of them, "one after the other." I joined issue with them, and addressed such niceties of language at him that he made a rush at me; the result was a general movement to "The Ten Acres"—an adjacent meadow—where the greatest battle of our times was fought out there and then. It was a long, a bloody, a Homeric affair. He was nearly a head taller and probably a stone heavier than I, but much more clumsy and without the same amount of staying-powers. In the end he had "had enough." And as the shadows were deepening, making the fields and by-ways mystical and suggestive of romance in the "'tween-lights," I went home, the blackened-eyed, nose-swollen, face-puffed, painful, prideful hero of them all. It is hard lines that an excess of bravery should bring punishment; yet such was my lot, in the shape of two days under lock-and-key, with continuous lessons, for "coming home like a battered Saturday-nighter."

With the beginning of the following week I was once more entered on the register of the village school; and though my attendance was far better than it had been in the wicked past, I still took various occasions to pander to the old Adam of free-will. A nomad at heart, like the old song-writer, "I was not made for buildèd walls." The fields and the heavens were my natural home, and I had to return for a spell now and then. It was at this time that my elders put me into the confirmation class at school. But when the evening of the confirmation service came around, the bright boy of the class was away sparrow-catching along hedges, with two stable-lanterns and a farmer's two sons. For which reason Aunt S——, when she came over to see us a week

later, said, "The lad who goes catching sparrows when he ought to be at church is bound to die a violent death."

So ran the uneven tenor of things a while longer. Trying to behave myself at home was like getting a pig to walk on a straight line. As for my playing the hare to the hounds of circumstance—it was all the other way about. Temperament and lack of training made me ever the hunted one, with no warren of subterfuge, and without the wisdom to use what pieces of cover there were on the coursing-ground. Then came flight again. Once more I repaired to Barnsley; but my father sent word that he would not be at my cost. I refused to return, sought work in one of the neighbouring mines, and was earning eighteen shillings per week, when I heard that a former Newmillerdam acquaintance, named Brown, had gone to sea, and that his master wanted another boy. This news reached me through his brother Joe at a village some four miles away, and at once decided my future movements. On the afternoon before the day on which I again became a son of Neptune, Joe and I "tickled" eight pounds of dyke trout. That night I slept with him. On the following morning, feeling that I was indeed going for good this time, leaving my small effects behind me and keeping the secret of my destination from all relatives, I took train from Wakefield. My arrival in Grimsby occurred about twelve o'clock. At two o'clock, in fearnought-trousers, a Faroe-guernsey and a *serge-shirt*—which I presently put off, as though it was the shirt of Nessus—I was away down the river, in a deep-sea smack, bound for the Dogger Bank.

This was at the end of the summer. The fortnight's trip was made in fine weather; and, so far from feeling inconvenience, I might have been born a seaman. Curiously enough, seeing the direction in which my literary inclinations first started off, haphazard, the

vessel's name was *Egeria*. At the end of the voyage I went with the owner—who was also skipper—to the old Custom-house, and there signed indentures lawfully to serve my master, etc.; in return for which he was to provide the necessities of life afloat and ashore, but not to pay a penny to me. A man out of the street stood by as my legal representative, received a half-crown for his services, and I was a prisoner. Months went by, and we were battling, in a 73-ton duck of a smack, with winter gales, when I realized the depth of my madness. I had signed away my freedom, had voluntarily, in a way, dealt the death-blow of that liberty for which I had fought so strenuously! Nor did I see the illegality of it till much later. I could have run away?—as before. Yes, and have been brought back forthwith. The dread of a prison had always filled me with fearsome gravity; and on all sides there were cases of apprentices being fetched back from far corners of the land, sent to gaol for fourteen or twenty-one days, then forced to work out their indentures, plus the time in prison. Well, the servitude alone was better than it, and a period in gaol to boot. Besides, on the whole I was happy enough. The life was rough, the roughest under the Red Ensign; the food was good and plentiful; the treatment was above complaint; and so I stayed on—under the lie, unchallenged seriously and unbelieving, that I was seventeen years of age when the deed was signed, whereas my age was thirteen!

It is not my intention to make a long record of this period. Elsewhere¹ I have endeavoured to depict the East-coast deep-sea fishery as it was in those years. Here it is enough to pick out the main points of the time I spent there. The first of these is the undoubted fact that the life built me up a constitution that has defied attacks under which I should otherwise have certainly

¹ In "Fishers of the Sea."

gone down. My reading was rather augmented than lessened; for in Brown I had an old acquaintance who was largely a kindred spirit, less my unfortunate leaning for devilment. I can remember times when we read stories backwards, rather than read nothing; and, beyond periodicals, the most of our purchases were standard works. In all this we were encouraged by our master and mistress. In addition to weathering-out gales, two of which seriously disabled the smack and sent her back under jury-sails to harbour; wild runs for safety, when heavy breezes began to cut short voyages which had so far been successful; experiencing two days and a half without food or water, on another occasion three days minus water, both in summer, and due to unusually protracted calms and our inability to get near a vessel, when we tried condensation by the cabin kettle, and sucked rags which had been allowed to lie a while on the bottoms of the water-tanks; carrying fish in open small boats with only two or three planks free, and a good sea running, often even in leaky boats, and strong winds to boot; saving crews of sinking timber droghers in heavy weather, and sometimes their vessels also—in addition to these features there was always the chance of an incident such as the following one, wherein I made my third knock at the door of death.

The day was a Sunday, "plum-duff day," in mid-December. The smack was lying-to under somewhat shortened sail, with a rather biggish lop coming down on her port bow. I was "deck-hand" at the time—*i. e.* promoted from boy-cook, my duty was to do all the steering, tacking and deck-work, in so far as one youthful pair of hands could do the latter, from six o'clock in the morning to six at night. When I returned on deck, from a big filling-out of roast pork—kept fresh in the ice-room—and baked potatoes, boiled fruit-pudding and white sauce, the skipper said I had better reeve a new pair of

lee jib-sheets. With the deck to myself, excepting the occasional comings and goings of the cook—who was my junior apprentice—I proceeded to the task, hauling the jib a-weather, while the tiller swung free and the *Egeria* came up in the wind. Having again secured the tiller and unrove the old lee-sheets, I got astride of the bowsprit and went out some four feet, so as to be nearly under the dangling clew of the sail. In this position my feet met and locked under the spar; and, as a support, because I had to *lean* somewhat to leeward, my hip rested against the chain-end of the topmast-stay, which ran parallel with the spar and was made fast in-board.

With my left hand on the tail of the stay, I reached up the rope, watched for an opportunity, and entered it into the swinging bull's-eye—when, snap! There was a rattle of running chain, my body swung to leeward of the spar, and I dropped headlong into the seething foam about the bows. The next moment I was jerked to the surface, dragged along for the space of some thirty seconds, perhaps; then left motionless, gasping and dumbfounded, on the water. Two parts of a patent link had separated, and I had unwittingly—no doubt instinctively—grasped, as I fell, the stay-end that led from the topmast-head through the iron loop at the outer end of the bowsprit. My unconscious hold on this had brought me to the surface, as the smack lifted her head to the swell, and it still lay in my hand.

But I had not long to think of what had taken place. The waters were romping around me like an overwhelming, mingling, merry, yet mad crowd of little imps, with the continual rolling past of devils in the shape of big seas. One part of a sea flopped squarely down on my face, and I felt myself sinking again. Now commenced a game at which I had never before played. Every time the vessel's head dipped between the pale green mud-

tinged rollers, I grappled up the slack chain for dear life; but when she rose again she tore it through my hands. The chain being small, therefore requiring the more strength to grasp it; the water so icy cold as to have chilled me to the bone at the first contact; and, having to lift the additional load of water in my thick clothing, I had not sufficient strength to bear my own weight.

Whenever I saw the bowsprit descending, I thought I might obtain a hold of it and struggle on to its top. Yet this means of rescue was denied me. On each occasion it uplifted when within a few inches of my reach. Meantime, I essayed to shout for help; but on opening my mouth for that purpose I was either so short of breath that the would-be cry died in a wheeze on my lips, or the water rushed in and stopped all utterance.

It was here that the cook came on deck to ask me to draw and hand him down to the steerage a couple of bucketfuls of water to swill off the soap-suds from the cabin floor. Knowing the task I had in hand, he looked forward, noticed the slackening and tightening of the topmast-stay, then the lower part hanging from the bowsprit-end. In new astonishment at this, he ran to the bow, saw me, and ran aft to the companion-way, shouting, "Ted's overboard! Ted's overboard! Skipper, skipper! Ted's over——." Before he could say more all hands were on deck, almost pushing each other aside in their eager endeavours to be first; and the boy saying, "Over the bow, skipper—over the bow!"

Little more than a second sufficed to bring the four to the weather-bow. There the skipper seized a line and threw it to me; but I failed to get a hold on it. Again he threw; again it was missed, and he stood in doubt as to what was best to do. The mate had his hands on the rail, and he looked at me as if in stupefaction. Brown—half-dressed, as fishermen always sleep—clambered out

on the bowsprit, and tried to reach me with his hand whenever the spar descended; but was a foot or so short on each occasion.

"Shove the 'elm a-lee, an' ease 'er!" cried the mate.

"Leave it alone," the skipper said, and forced himself to be calm. "If you do that the bowsprit'll come down an' dash in his skull." (This would be caused by checking the vessel's speed, consequent on putting the tiller a-lee.) "Get me the boat-hook!" he added to the mate.

Some one obeyed the order. The implement, however, was some feet too short, and the skipper despairingly dropped it on the deck. At this juncture Brown, seeing he could do no good out on the spar, went in-board, and said, "Shall we get the boat out?"

"No!" the mate replied. "Isn't she stove both sides?—an' wouldn't live a jiffy!"

Once more the skipper hove the line—and again—and again; yet as regularly was it missed by its object. I was growing more numbed and dazed with every minute that passed. Still the game went on: the spar descended, and my hands climbed over each other; though now more from instinct than energy. The spar rose in the air, and I was left half-in and half-out of the water. My strength was now so far gone that death seemed to be hovering between me and the bowsprit; and this idea was, in a vague way, taking possession of the others' minds.

"Let go!" roared the skipper, "an' we'll pick you up." But I would not. I was in a position to think more quickly than they. I knew the boat's condition. I thought it impossible for them to pick me up from the smack's side; and I felt that to release my grasp would be to sink at once, for my strength was almost gone. I dared not let go. Thus the matter continued, and the three men—with the trembling boy in the background—watched me, while two of them grew well-nigh frantic

with impotence, and the other tried to look as concerned as they.

"We'll have to do it," said the skipper, with grim, firm sadness. "It's the best thing for him. *Put* the tiller a-lee."

I faintly heard him giving some orders about getting out on the bowsprit, ready to seize me when the spar came down. At that moment I lost consciousness; the chain slipped from me, and I drifted against the weather-bow.

"Hold on!" yelled Brown, who alone was then watching me. "Get hold of my legs!" and he slid head-first over the rail by the fore-shroud, as the other two grabbed at his bootless limbs. I floated near, just sinking. Brown called out, "Lower!"

They let him down another foot. His arms and head came into the icy water. His clutch fastened on my clothes, and by one of those superhuman efforts men only know at such times, we were lifted clear over the bulwarks into safety.

When my senses returned, I was lying on a locker by the cabin fire. Salt water had been pumped out of me by putting me face-downwards on a water-keg and rolling it to and fro. I was in dry clothes; and my first thought, involuntary impression rather, was that the hand which had been held over my head in the cellar was near me then. While I was under the bowsprit, even up to the chain slipping away from me and the inrush of that mental darkness, there was no thought in my mind except that of rescue—just as on a previous occasion a big sea put the smack temporarily under water, and I held to the top of the companion-hutch, thinking that it was carried away, and I would float with it, as the vessel seemed to be sinking under me. Would they reach me, and how?—together with the determination not to release my hold voluntarily, because

of the weight of all my heavy clothing and sea-boots, were the only ideas in my head. And as I laid there, in the silence that held for a few minutes after my eyes opened, I had no feeling of having been shaking hands with death, no proper contrition for past ill-deeds, nor a touch of that sense which is said to be common to those who feel the presence of the departed. Presently there were the usual jokes consequent to the happy ending of such an affair, in the midst of which I learnt the details of what had happened on deck, out of my sight and hearing, while I was overboard.

Against such drawbacks as the foregone, there were the long spells of summer idleness, due to calms; swimming matches at sea, and bets on high diving, in consequence of which I, diving from a brig's foreyard, once stuck my hands and a part of my head into the black mud at the bottom of Grimsby Old Dock. There was also smuggling of Dutch, German and Flemish tobacco and perfumes, bought from "coopers" at sea, into Grimsby by such means as knocking in the head of a water-cask, placing the *contrabando* inside securely done up in waterproof coverings, then replacing the head and filling the cask with water; or putting the smuggled goods into the heart of a "fender" made of old rope and netting, and leaving it carelessly lying on the deck—with, of course, every one in the crew knowing that the thing was not to be used. I have seen a Customs officer fall over such a "fender," then kick it aside, in pain and vexation. On one occasion, about midnight, two of us stepped ashore together, each with a box of cigars, over two pounds of tobacco, and a bottle of Florida water in his clothes-bag. The vessel was lying head-on to the quay. Immediately in front stood a fish-salesman's box-like office, at which we separated—one to go straight home, quietly, quickly, and unchallenged; while the other walked directly into the arms of a "rummager,"

on the other side of the office, who examined his bag, and caused him to pay the usual treble duty, a thirty-shillings fine, and the loss of his contraband articles.

Thus went the first three years of that period, during which I actually won a silver watch and chain, given to me by the skipper-owner's wife for six months of exemplary behaviour! Reason was taking the place of that old governing principle of the savage, *lex talionis*; and there was some unheeded irony in the fact that the folks at home knew nothing of this wonderful metamorphosis. How they would have held up their hands in amazement, had they, to whom my groat's worth of wit was just impulse and instinct, been told that I was becoming civilized!

Then came the time when, as an apprentice-mate of eighteen, I revisited those glimpses of the reprehensible past. Blazoned out and mightily portentous in a fine cloth reefer suit and a "cheese-cutter" cap with a shining peak, I arrived in Normanton—a stranger to all whom I met, and knowing none till I went to the family of the local beauty for whose favour and my own satisfaction I met the village bully in "The Ten Acres," and with whom I was still on more than nodding acquaintance. From them I found that my father had moved to a small village some four miles away. There I walked, and found, of course, that my coming was as a jump from the moon. An outsider would have said that my reception was a cold one. It certainly acted rather douche-like on me; but then the basis of that "me" was still the old elementary well of feeling, then boarded over by growing reason and greater imitation of others, yet likely to heave up its flood and sweep away placid convention whenever a strong subterranean rumbling passed along. But looking back, from the calm lagoon of now to the hurrying stream of then, I am fain to confess that my welcome was genuine enough at heart; outwardly it

was merely temperamental, family-like on his mother's side, and only what a scapegrace deserved. Yet in our early years we are so prone, most of us, to build on our unconsidered desires, as in later years we build on the solid ground of experience and probabilities. Naturally, there were visits to old scenes, particularly to Normanton churchyard and like places. But how grown-up I seemed to be in it all! Had I ever indulged in such elemental pleasures and infantile savagery? It was hardly believable! Four years of hard life, wide reading, continual visits to a theatre with a good, old stock company and a long repertory of standard plays, music-halls (such as they were then), and the general atmosphere of a town that was said, up and down the coast, to be one with not a scrap of morals to spare—these adjuncts to development, together with the oft-repeated flattery of my elders, proved in daily experience at sea and at work commonly—therefore the more insidious in its poison of conceit—that I was the mental superior of those around me (Brown excepted, for he, too, had been mate while still an apprentice), had given the old, small things a far-awayness from which they would never come to me. Ignorant of the true pathos of this, yet feeling a sadness which I could neither define nor really comprehend, I turned from scene after scene, and spoke of going to grandmother's. Then it was I learnt that she was dead, that the homestead was broken up and all were gone—my father knew not where. Strong in body and mind, unhappily self-assertive and reliant, with all the defects and the courage of eighteen years (in reality) and an unusual measure of success, the conquering feeling of having put all old, bad prophecies to shame, and—as my master and his wife knew—with a formulated plan of travel and study to the furthering of future conquest, I had, indeed, come home to taste the ashes of foiled expectations, to find griefs where I had looked

eagerly for pleasures. To put it less sadly, Alexander had returned to discover that he was only a very common sort of person, after all, and not one for whom even a lean calf should be killed!

Sans feast, sans outward warmth, sans joy in old things, also with the knowledge that Mary's mug had been once more broken and the pieces lost, my back was turned on it all, without a care ever to see any of it again. At Barnsley I met with more open interest and sympathy, especially from my half-brother. Still, this was not carrying my redemption to the scenes of former depredations, the same as in going to Normanton and home. So, there, too, much of the savour was lost. After a week, in which visits were made to the graves of my mother and sister, I went back to sea—remembering that climb up the silver birch for the paltriness of a sparrow's nest, and at heart sadder than I had been since the old days of loneliness, revolt and punishment; therefore wiser, for wisdom comes rather by sorrows than by joys.

Some scraps of navigation had been picked up by this time, such as taking an observation by quadrant, doing "a day's work," etc. But enough for the day was the navigation thereof. My ambition lay not in the mastership of any craft afloat. In the furthering of that formulated design I began to learn German by book, and my reading was maintained by such stages as an almost complete perusal of Lytton, who was then my god of fiction; a none too careful reading of Scott; a revelling in the doings of Lever's and Lover's scapegrace and improvident Irish heroes and dashing, winning heroines—Con Cregan, again, delighted me to the uttermost; as the paladins of Charlemagne and Saladin had been my be-alls and end-alls in their way, so was Con in his roguery and the wonderful paddling of his own canoe. But the truer representations of Carleton came not my way. Dickens I did not properly understand,

and Thackeray was farther off. But nothing could have surpassed the vividness and reality with which I went through "Frankenstein," "The Devil on Two Sticks," "Faust"—both versions—Sue's "Wandering Jew," Reynolds's "Werewolf," and other deviline literature. About this time I also started the customary "Journal," which was destined to reach the bulkiness of six large volumes, cover some fourteen years, and finally arrive on the fiery altar of oblivion. I then also wrote eighteen chapters of a novel, simple realism, which were likewise consigned to the flames in later times; and, sans all knowledge of prosody, began to scribble verse of a serious nature, such as "Lines to a Blackbird" that had too trustingly built its nest and hatched out young ones flagrantly open and easy of reach to passers-by, "Lines to an Old Oak" that was a lovers' trysting-place, and some further bathos to a clock, one stanza of which I recollect—

Tick, tick, tick—the waning hours are flying ;
 Time never stops ; the moments are dying ;
 Heed thou the lesson, it needs no reply—
 Work, work now, as the moments thou must die.
 This life is but a journey with halting places many,
 And mortals, packed¹ with troubles, are but travellers at
 the best ;
 Then think of what thou doest, and if any
 Of thy talents have found birth,
 Work—as the pendulum, thou must rest.

Truly there was a wheel out of place somewhere in the machinery of things, when a youth of eighteen was finding pleasure in such expressions ! The pendulum of my affairs, mental and moral, had fetched up hard against the wall opposite to that of those old, unhappy, far-off things. A reading of Wordsworth had led to the "Lines" to this, that and the other. Now the ingrained puritanism of inheritancy, stirred afresh by "Foxe's Book of Martyrs" and a new following of Bunyan's

¹ Carrying packs, as pedlars !

Pilgrim, was breaking out in most reprehensible seriousness. However, a former acquaintance, who had become a friend by the process of kindred tastes—except that he liked strong drink—and discussions, led me gently back, by the way of dramatic literature—his panacea for all evils short of hunger, a broken leg, and tradesmen's bills—to the sanity of early manhood. It was in his house that I first heard of Meredith; but, unfortunately, not in a way to send me to the great Victorian's books. Truth to tell, the work of then living writers was mostly unknown to me. In reading matter generally I was still like some present-day publishing houses, over whose portals one might read: Nothing here is stable but the dead. Unhappily my friend died, of complications set up by a chill taken at the grave-side of a friend of his. I sat by him during a Saturday night, having arrived in port that day. On Sunday morning, at my foolish suggestion and his wife's request, I was mad enough to shave off his week's stubble, he being delirious all the time. But no harm was done. He died that night, and his widow often afterwards said how much better that shave had made him appear to be as he lay in the coffin.

On returning from a voyage, some months after my visit home, I was told that my father had been to Grimsby, made inquiries as to my general conduct, position, prospects, and the like, and had gone away again, leaving a message to the effect that he hoped I should continue to do well for myself. Six weeks later he came again. I was in harbour. What he had previously asked of others he then learnt from me, and ascertained its correctness. We spent half a day together, more like father and son than on any other particular occasion within my memory. Our parting at the railway-station, in the dusk of that evening, was the last on this earth.

One subject more, and that period will be at an end.

During some months, but always when sleeping on shore, I dreamt, off and on, some fragments of a curious dream that would not leave me; not that it contained anything of a haunting nature, but that it came again and again in disjointed pieces, till I seemed to have them all, yet could not put them together. Then I experienced the thing in its entirety, not once, but on three consecutive nights, each time seeing every item in it as clearly as in a Watteau picture—clearer, for the different sensations in the affair were all impressed on my sensibility with all the vividness of actuality. Briefly, it was this: With a large crowd of persons I, apparently much older than at the period of the dream, came out of a great building, on a sunny and genial afternoon. They dispersed at once, to right and left; but they all kept on that side of the street where the building stood. I crossed to the opposite pavement. There occurred to me the thoughts: It's a long way around by this main thoroughfare; you don't know your way through the heart of the town here; so why not get up and go? That was the idea—Get up and go, get up and go. Without any further to-do, and with no sense of any power except that of will, I arose to an altitude of about twice the height of the large building. There, with my body at an angle of some forty-five degrees with the earth, I turned around and—led by instinct or intuition, for I had not then been to the place—I headed for my destination. There was no sense of flying in this movement, only a sort of mental propulsion which carried me along, in perfect ease, at probably four miles an hour. Nor had my ascending and departure caused any commotion on the streets below. Some persons looked up casually, then went their ways, quite ordinarily; the majority did not even glance in my direction. On my first rising from the ground there was an impression within me that I must not go above a certain height, about that of

an average church steeple, or I should be "out of my depth"—so high as to have no strength to proceed. Presently this idea came in a more practical manner; my strength was ebbing, and I must go to earth for its renewal. Even in the dream, as I appeared to sail along over those dirty little streets, alleys and yards below, I remembered the old Greek fable of the wrestler, Antæus, whose strength was redoubled every time his feet touched the ground. So down I came, and found myself in an enclosure, perhaps twenty feet square and surrounded by a wall quite twelve feet high. It was at least six inches deep of repellent dirt. Something within told me that I could not rise out of this. Seeing a low tunnel and knowing that it must be my way out, I dropped on hands and knees and began to creep through the passage; in doing so I found coins galore, gold, silver and copper, in the mud through which I was crawling. My pockets were filled, and as much of the wealth as possible was held to my body with one hand, while I hobbled along on the other hand and my knees. When I emerged from the tunnel I was in a great slum yard, where the beggars and thieves of the neighbourhood were having a sort of gala day, while high on a rough dais in one corner sat a nondescript, middle-aged man in a more grotesque rig-out than ever went to a *bal masque*. Something told me at once that he was "King of the Thieves and Beggars." At the same instant a party of ragamuffin urchins began to pelt me with refuse. I turned to the king, appealed to him for justice; he immediately stopped the fusillade, heard my account of how I arrived there and whither I was going; then told off some of the subdued youngsters to pilot me out of the slums. I thanked him, and departed at their heels. When they presently left me in a broad thoroughfare it was with profound respect. Then came the idea again—Get up and go. And I did as before; but

presently had to descend because of a very high railway-bridge, surmounted by telegraph-wires which were "beyond my depth." It must be noted that this strange propulsion could not be maintained unless the blue sky was over me. Under the bridge I had no power. After walking a little way, in thick, blackish dust that suggested coal mines and a locality that was certainly familiar, I suddenly became aware of two girls being at my side, one of some eighteen years quite close, and a much younger one on the other side of her. Then I saw that I was naked, with all my clothes over the left arm. To this fact they paid not the slightest heed. In a little while they passed across my back and disappeared up a side-street. Soon afterwards I saw the house, a large stone one, to which I was going. No person was in sight. I dressed, went to the door, and was admitted.

In later years I again dreamt of passing through the air in the same manner, but never again experienced that vision. I did, however, just before the end of my apprenticeship, dream of standing at an altar and being married to an unusually small woman whose height and figure were as clear as a silhouette, yet whose face was a blank. In fact, there appeared to be no face. The ceremony was suddenly cut short ere the ring was produced. I had never seen a wedding; but when this dream was fully described to some friends, they told me that every detail was correct. The sequel will be found towards the end of this record.

When the day of my freedom came I made all haste home, wondering why my father had not written to me in this interval. But home there was none. He had disappeared, leaving no trace behind. After a visit to my mother's people, I, feeling strangely sorrowful that I could never again speak of my home as being So-and-so, returned to Grimsby, resolved to go abroad.

CHAPTER III

A new ship and an old friend—A greenhorn's "dunnage"—Living in fancy—Stabbed—A typical Frenchman—Port Louis, Mauritius—A deplorable affair—Midnight musings—In Bombay—A fascinating sight—Falling into a god-house—Terrible suspense—Hidden in the god—A nerve-racking venture—The passage barred—Shall I fight?—Another hiding-place—A spring for freedom.

AFTER spending about eight months as the profit-sharing mate of a deep-sea smack, I set about the finding of a berth in some foreign-going vessel. Friends tried to persuade me from this course, particularly a happy, comfortably-conditioned family named Wright, and English in all that was best, one of whose sons had become so much a comrade to me that I had taken up my home with them. It was all to no good, however. My plans were made—travel as best I could, read the while, then stay ashore, study and pursue my life's purpose. A berth as A.B. was quickly found in a steamer bound to Port Natal; and, to my great joy and surprise, I found Old Shells installed as bo'sun. At the shipping office he recognized me almost at once, and said, "I owe you five bob, here it is; I borrowed it w'en I was hard up in Hull, little more 'an five years ago." Having made a compromise that he should keep the money till I needed it more than he did (I was leaving my winter's savings behind for the proverbial rainy day), we went aboard, he telling me that the vessel was very likely to go from Natal to India. In consequence of this I spent that evening raking around old and new bookshops for whatever could be found on India. Beyond the Slave Coast, Gold Coast and Livingstone, Africa was a dead letter

in my reading experiences; but "the gorgeous East"—ah! on several expeditions of fancy I had been there, felt the magnetism of its subtle charms, and——. Well, to tell the truth, in that, as in many another matter, I was still a boy. Thus came my "chest" to contain so much literature that two dock-side workmen had to be paid to carry the thing from a handcart to the fo'c'sle! This was not a proper seaman's chest, but a big iron trunk; in addition to which I had the usual canvas bag of clothes, thicker than and as long as myself! No wonder that simple I and my "cartload o' 'dunnage'" were stared at by the officers and such others of the crew as were then aboard; especially as no sailor, and rarely a lower grade officer, ever takes more than a bag on a steamer-voyage. Happily, I was well into the work before I heard many of my shipmates' remarks on that occasion.

From the very first Shells showed to me a deep, fatherly, manly kindness, continuous and shorn of all nonsense, such as had not come my way since the disappearance of my old Irish friend at Normanton. His sobriquet came of a characteristic and a disfigurement—he appeared to be considerably older than his forty-eight years, and he was profusely tattooed with representations of sea-shells. In his early life he had been much amongst the South Sea Islands. He drank but little, did not talk much, lived a clean life, knew his work to the bare end, and read a book now and then. His life was the expression of his opinions.

All the way out, including a stoppage for coal at the Cape de Verde Islands (where the foolish Portuguese authorities put us into quarantine—with a clean bill of health from an English port!—and half-caste boys dived into shark-infested waters for coins and even lumps of coal), I read and dreamed and dreamed and read. What a romance those thirty-seven days of fine-weather-steam-

ing were to me ! Such nicknames as the "Queer 'Un," "the Maid" (owing to the hairless condition of my face, then supposed to be nearly twenty-three years of age) and "Bookshop" made no difference to me. I could do my work with the next one and had very agreeable watchmates, especially a Swede of the better order. The officers treated me with all kindness, though amused and rather perplexed at my oddities, and altogether the passage was a glorious holiday to me. As to the food, it was far from what I had been accustomed to; but, according to the provisions in the "tramp" craft of those days, it could easily have been both worse and less. Again, what was short and indifferent food to a young man who gloried in the possession of insolent health, in world-conquering spirits, and was just getting his heart's wish gratified ? Our vessel was too large to go into Natal; so she had to lie in the open bay, with two anchors down and steam up all the time. It fell to me to be night-watchman; and one night, due to my interfering on the side of justice, I was stabbed in the right leg by one of the black cargo-workers, some sixty of whom were accommodated in the hold from day to day. Which one of the negroes dealt the blow could not be discovered. As a punishment all who had been in the fracas were sent ashore. The hole in my leg was strapped up. The carpenter made me a crutch and I remained on duty, leaving the blacks severely to themselves. There I again became a writer of love-letters for others, mostly well-behaved, vigorous "Tynesiders" and Scandinavians with sweethearts or wives in northern ports.

From Natal we went in ballast to the Mauritius, carrying such a crowd of nondescript deck-passengers as even the varied East could produce. In the cabin we had a Frenchman, with his wife and children, who had cleared £17,000 in seven years up country. While amongst

those picturesque rags and colours on the decks there was his brother, then returning home with empty pockets, after twelve years zealously seeking wealth in a country where it teemed so much that I—the wonder-seeking, literature-bent Verdant Green—had thought of “jumping” the ship and going to the gold-fields! Yet he was not scoured in the least. Typical of his countrymen—even of the whole nation in its wonderful commercial recovery in a short time after the Franco-Prussian War—he took it brightly, if not altogether lightly, extracting from it a philosophy and a readiness to begin afresh which were good to see. Early one night I came upon him on the after-deck. He was leaning against the rail and smoking. Before this the steward had fallen ill; the cook had taken his place, and I was doing the cook’s work. Because of this fact I had been able to render certain little services to this interesting white man, in addition to making a pocketful of rupees by allowing some of the Asiatics, with whom a grinning fate had temporarily put him on a social level, to boil sundry pans of rice, etc., on my galley-stove, when sprays were flying over their open cabooses.

“You are very quiet,” I remarked.

“Yes,” said he, meditatively blowing out a mouthful of smoke. “I am being much entertained, so I should be quiet.”

“How?” asked I.

He replied, nodding here and there while speaking, “I am listening to these Buddhists planning a marriage for the little daughter when they get to India; next to them, by the mast there, is an Arab story-teller reciting a romance to his half-dozen compatriots; on the hatch, to the right of them, that Creole family began by jangling over a trifle, now it has got to jealous upbraiding, and may end in something to do for Dr. Scott” (who was medically in charge of the crowd); “by the hatch

there, on the deck, that young Malay is pouring a passion of love into the ears of the girl whose head you can see around the corner of the hatch, while their parents pretend to be asleep on both sides of them; here, close to our right, under the bulwarks, this elderly Mussulman is reciting passages from the Koran and expounding them to his son, who is all the time trying secretly to attract the attention of that siren there in the moonlight, whose eyes glitter so through the holes in her *yashmak*. So, you see, I cannot complain of ennui—can I?”

For an hour we stood there together, he telling me how this or that item of interest was progressing; while I envied him his world-wide reach through linguistic channels, and the *Algitha* throbbed her shimmering way towards Port Louis, and all the world seemed to be one teeming, overlapping, interlacing, ever-changing, bubbling cauldron of romance.

We anchored just within the harbour, on the port-hand. On the Saturday evening I was going ashore with Shells when Mr. S——, the second-mate, came along—a fine, lively young fellow from the north, who had fallen into the habit of calling me “Skyrocket” and borrowing my books. He came in our boat, and led the way to an “hotel” close to the head of the harbour. Perched on a stool by the bar sat a grey-haired Creole fiddling away at “Little Sister’s Gone to Sleep.” In addition to its pathos to me, this was one of the favourite evening songs in the family of my Grimsby friends. So, perhaps, there is not much to wonder at in tears leaping to my eyes almost before we reached the bar. The second-mate asked what was the matter. “Nothing much,” said I, stifling the weakness; then to the Creole, further to screen my outburst, “Here, stop that mother-love-me ditty! Play an Irish jig or a Scotch reel, and here’s half a rupee for you!” Within five minutes the

officer and I were footing it merrily to "The Irish Washer-woman." On our leaving there I could see that Shells wished to be quit of our companion; but the latter was badly in need of company and held on. My friend was doing his utmost to keep me from being led to places where he would have me not go. In this manner we entered a Chinaman's tea-house on the right of the harbour and somewhat away from the town. There Mr. S—— played a joke on me, in the shape of a cup of "real China tea as they drink it in China." Without sugar or milk and, unknown to me, boiling hot, I was to drink it off at a draught, "as they did in China." I made to do so, scalded my mouth, as with grandmother's elderberry "syrup"; then spat the stuff out and flung the cup at the second-mate. It smashed on the partition behind him, and he laughed at the whole affair. Not so the tea-man, however; who came forward vigorously expostulating. He quickly became offensive. I was smarting under a peeled palate; and the end was grievous trouble. We had entered that diminutive pagoda-looking establishment with the peace of angels on us; we left it in pain, two of us with the partially expended anger of devils in our hearts, and the poorer by twenty rupees, which the intervening police-sergeant arranged should be the price of the damage done to the Chinaman, his four or five assistants and his tea-shop.

At the end of this deplorable affair Mr. S—— left us, he and I being none the worse friends, for we had fought together. But Shells, while feeling resentment to both the second-mate and the Celestials, was sorrowful for me. At his instigation we at once returned aboard, where I immediately changed my soiled and torn white-drill suit—in which I had gone ashore so spic and span and prideful—procured some soothing application for the roof of my mouth, then turned in to

read; smoking was out of the question. By-and-by, being unable to sleep, I went on deck, fell under the witchery of the warm, phosphorescent night, fetched out my "Journal" and wrote by the light of that brilliant tropical moon—

Wayfaring I—t'wards some unlettered grave—
 Am halted here beside the devious way;
 My fight with Fortune stayed till comes the day,
 And thus I dream 'twixt moon and shimmering wave;
 Dream, dream, and think that nought on earth I need;
 Slow drifting down the stream, Romantic, I
 Find worlds of joy in thoughts that drift me by,
 And leave me tracing still with fancy's reed.

And what's my loss that by it comes no gain?
 What others lose I have; they may have mine,
 And welcome are, whilst theirs I do disdain.

My dreams are wealth no riches e'er attain;
 Their wealth but saps the intellectual vine,
 And makes each life a long materialised pain. . . .

So ran the epicurean philosophy of youth. Oh, youth!—happy, happy youth!—happy in its blindness, though it be not always youthful in its undertow. Then the regular wash-wash of the sea on the beach near by drew my thoughts away to its undertone of melody, to its strangely attractive and equally strange individualism of sound and spirit; to a vain effort to read, and a still vainer endeavour to transcribe that subtle message which it was delivering there in that night of wondrous beauty, which neither the mosquitoes nor the blatant blasts of the bugler ashore could spoil. Vain, ay, I could just as easily have taken a marline-spike and spliced the right-hand strands of friendship into the left-hand strands of hatred, as to have put on paper even some "reflected essence" of that poetry which the sea was then uttering. Yet, such is the perversity of our make, I wondered for a while why it was and, alas! still is—that the poets, not the mere versemen, of such an exceptionally mari-

time nation as ours, have so signally failed in giving us an adequate rendering of the sea's moods, phases, and all that is oceanic. Still, one has to face the bare truth that this is the most difficult form of poetical expression, even to the poet who has spent years afloat. It is no great task to write *to* the sea, as so many have done and thought they were writing *of* the sea; any person of sufficient feeling, imagination, and some facility in expression can attain to that end. Nor, given the same amount of ability, is it difficult to write of the sea, so far as a landsman can know it; but to write that which is, so to speak, the sea itself—to saturate the lines in a mist of brine and salt winds, to make them carry the illusive music of the sea, and even a semblance of its subtlety and that mysterious "message" which it is ever murmuring or pounding into the dull earth, is the work of such a poet as Nature has not yet given us. But here I am coming ashore too early.

There it was that I first became on bare-arm and painful terms of familiarity with mosquitoes. The liberty they took with the liberty given, I having no curtain for them during the first two nights, made me resolve there and then and for ever to count them as being of most ill repute. I did afterwards meet with larger of their breed, but never with any so gluttonous for fresh young blood. My neck, wrists and ankles were so especially favoured of them that these parts of me puffed out well-nigh to the thickness of their neighbours. Wherefore in my rage I did this: "Instanter to Mosquitoes, 2 a.m., no sleep yet and have to be out at 5.30."

Ye curst destroyers of my hard-earned sleep!
I wish you all a thousand fathoms deep
In some salt ocean grave!
Or that the mighty Alps on you were piled,
Or you a prey to all the demons wild
Who haunt grim Styx's wave!

I wish you were the Devil's¹ honoured guests,
And all your hell-stings where my hate suggests—
In heart, in hornèd pate;
So that he hurled you down his deepest pot,
Then on the prisoning lid himself he got
And damned for aye your state!

Then I slept better—during that night, at least.

After an attempt by Shells and myself to reach the scene of "Paul and Virginia," stopped by one of the Isle of France's own particular hurricanes, and my being accosted by a Welsh Fusilier who had worked in the Normanton mines and recognized me, the *Algitha* steamed for Bombay. We reached that port without mishap, and anchored in the stream. As is usual in such vessels, Saturday night, "money night," saw a general exodus of the forward hands and the lesser grade officers and engineers to shore. Again I, now crammed with my literature of an India that was almost gone by, went with Shells. The time, till near midnight, was spent at the Royal Oak, kept by one Parsee George, on Bombay Green; a passably respectable house this was, where we could eat, drink and be merry, as became men who were fresh from a long-cramping-up aboardship. When the songs were all sung and most of the singers were asleep, Shells, I and two other Englishmen left the place and began a slow and apparently circuitous ramble back to the water-side, *en route* for our vessels. Presently I, finding interest on the wayside, lagged behind, seemingly unnoticed, the others being deep in an argument on seamanship. At rare points we passed native policemen, to some of whom I put odd questions, thereby losing more ground; then moved on to wonder at the lizards inside the street-lamps, or picture Arabian Night-like happenings in the few houses I passed. I make no excuse for the trouble I got into

¹ At that time I still lingered in the faith of early training, the belief in a personal Devil!

that night. Given the necessary temperament, a sufficiently foolish disregard of possible eventualities, a thirst for knowledge or mischief, and adventures can be had to-day even in English back-yards. Besides, as the reader knows, I was young at the time—a remark that cloaks up more errors than beauty covers sins. And what pitfalls are there not possible to the green seeker after hidden things? Oh, those salad-days, when the world seems young as ourselves!—when life lies before us like an open Aladdin's cave full of rich mysteries, golden delights and deeds of derring-do!—when we have not grown to be men, and to know the futility of high endeavour. But it was not the glamour of romance, not a desire to get out of the prosaicism of average life, which led me into that strange Eastern god-house and caused me six hours of terror and suspense. No, it was simple curiosity, a pure first-hand itching to know—that, and an accident.

So far had I fallen astern that when I at length turned a corner, where stood a house which I shall never forget, I was following my companions more by instinct than by knowledge of the way they had gone. The house occupied the left-hand corner of the street I had traversed. It had nothing special in its appearance. It was not walled-in, but was built back some eight or ten feet from the remainder of the street on that side, and had a big banana-tree growing on the intervening space. Up to the moment of this turn I had merely gazed about in search of some object of striking interest. It came in the moment that I rounded the building.

About eight feet from the corner of the house there was a shuttered, but sashless, window, one shutter being quite closed, the other very slightly ajar. Through the long slit of an opening I saw, in the lighted room beyond, a native stripped to his waist, making the lowest salaams possible. What he could be bowing to

in such a manner and at that time of night—well-nigh the “hour when churchyards yawn and graves give up their dead”—so mystified me that instantly I crept up to the window and took a peep within. High in a curious sort of chair framework sat the most ugly carving my eyes had ever encountered. Its repulsiveness was abnormal, both in colour and feature, so far as I could tell by that narrow, visible section down its middle from head to feet; for it was painted to look even worse than the carver’s chisel had made it. This awful-looking deity was the object of the salaams! The man I had seen quickly proved to be one of a party, whom I discovered in ones and twos as they filed between me and the image which they were worshipping. I stood transfixed by interest. Believer in a personal devil though I still was, I was also a young Englishman in the free thoroughfare of a British-governed city; hence there was no reason to dread what I saw. But I could not see enough. The opening ’twixt those shutters was only a knife-edge-like slit. I must see more. For this reason I gained an insecure kneeling position on the foot-wide, three-feet-high ledge on that side of the house. My intense excitement and eagerness to see more of that strange worship prevented all thought of the difficulty of keeping such a position for any length of time.

Slowly and with the utmost caution I began to draw the shutter farther away from its fellow. During this operation that little band of devotees passed continually to and fro before their image, salaaming and prostrating themselves in the utmost abjection. My eyes were strained in an endeavour to catch a glimpse of those portions of the room which were still hidden from me by the shutters. Then came the keynote of probable tragedy. Too intent on watching the doings within to keep a proper guard on my own, I pulled mechanically at the shutter, even when it had stopped moving. At

this point it was half-open. Its hinges were evidently rusty. They creaked a shrill warning, grating on the ear in an alarming fashion. In an instant all within was dark as the grave, and as quiet. Not so with me. Fear at the consequences of my foolish curiosity robbed me of all proper self-control. In wildly endeavouring to counteract an overbalancing I jerked the shutter quite open—and toppled bodily into the room !

The thud of my body on the boarded floor was a signal for fresh movements on the part of my enemies, as I now guessed the worshippers to be. To judge by the noise of their feet they made a rush bodily at the window. But life on board ship and escapades in tight corners on shore had already taught me some monkeyish tricks. Over I rolled, almost as soon as I bumped on the floor. A foot struck against mine as I cleared the rush. Its owner went down headlong by the wall under the window. On him pounced his fellows, apparently thinking him the intruder—at least, it seemed so to me—and whilst they struggled there in the darkness, in a subdued hubbub of mutterings and scuffling, I crept swiftly away on hands and knees.

Feeling that my life was in my hands I made a rapid retreat from the little crowd, not knowing nor caring whither I went, so be that I got away. My right shoulder bumped against a wall, and along it I sped. A corner turned me off. The quiet scuffle by the window continued; evidently the excited natives had not yet discovered their mistake. I hurried forward, and was brought up suddenly by my head striking an obstacle. A moment's examination proved the barrier to be some steps, up which I went, spurred on by the fact that a minute lost would probably mean death to me, whilst one gained might save my life.

Still hugging the wall, I quickly found myself beside the chair of that awful-looking god. Now, I remembered

seeing, through the slit that had led me into this scrape, a doorway to the right of the god's dais. For this doorway I was about to make when my arm encountered a large space between the image and the wall. I at once pressed into it—to find the god a hollow one! A minute later a light flashed on the scene and the scuffling in the corner ceased abruptly.

Inside the figure I huddled, mightily pleased at finding it big enough to hold two of my size in comfort. Never before, surely, was a prisoner so thankful for his cell! As I crouched there in that hollow accumulation of ugliness, afraid to look out because of enemies chancing near enough to see me, yet expecting discovery every moment, I listened to a new hubbub among the worshippers. In all likelihood some new arrivals with a light had shown that the sacrilegious intruder was not there, and they were endeavouring to solve the mystery of his disappearance. In consequence there was much hurrying to and fro amongst them, much coming and going, many apparent queries and as many disappointing answers. Having no weapons with which to fight my way out if discovered and attacked, everything depended upon strategy, so all my faculties were concentrated preternaturally on what I heard. Being unable to see anything that was going on, my hearing and intuitive deduction became painfully acute in this dangerous situation. I would have given years of my life to have been able to understand what was said whilst they rapidly came and went. My natural supposition was that they were searching for me. I thought of Thugs and saw myself the subject of almost certain torture—an English youth murdered in secret, missed by the way and never discovered. If I ever got out of that place alive I vowed I would never again be tempted to put my head into such another scrape. This I swore, off and on, whilst wondering what the idol-worshippers were doing, and alternately ponder-

ing my chances of escape. Repeatedly the lamps they carried flashed brief beams of light across the space between the god and the wall, and as often as those flashes came I thought that the fanatics were about to discover me. For hours I seemed to be imprisoned there, yet the awful suspense I endured, whilst the hurrying about and excited talking continued, was probably not of more than fifteen minutes' duration.

When the soft patter of naked feet on the bare floors and the general hubbub had subsided, a quiet consultation (as it seemed to me) took place in the middle of that great room. What the result was would be idle of me to guess. But, although I had just previously turned renegade on curiosity, my desire to know what was being done compelled me to turn round in search of a peephole, which was soon discovered somewhere about the fastening of the huge god's carven sash.

It was a small hole, to which I could apply only one eye, and the narrow radius of my vision soon proved peculiarly exasperating. Scarcely had I focused the little crowd of about twenty devotees when they broke apart and resumed their interrupted worshipping. In all probability they considered that I had escaped through the window-hole ere they replaced the shutter. Perhaps they were afraid to approach their idol, to look for the sacrilegious intruder there. Then came the end. The worshippers—all men, by the way—filed in solemn procession out of sight, headed by one and followed by the other of the two priests bearing their quaint flaring lamps with them.

I was left in absolute darkness—alone with that great lump of repulsive carving—alone to escape, as I thought, back to the comparative safety of a public street. The silence was oppressive, yet most welcome, it seemed to be peculiarly pregnant with the spirit of what-might-be in the heavy heat of that Indian night.

For a time I remained still, straining my hearing to detect the faintest sound. When at last I felt that all was quiet in the place, I slipped down to a sitting posture and took off my shoes, then tied their strings together, in order to hang them over my shoulders, for I should need them when once clear of the god-house. My next move was a painfully slow seeking for the window by which I had tumbled into the place—painful chiefly because of my efforts not to make the slightest noise, and to be alert to the least disturbance outside myself. Nautical instinct in the matter of bearings led me almost straight to the desired object. The window, however, proved to be secured in a manner that I could not unfasten! A premonition of this disconcerting fact ran through me as my fingers travelled hurriedly over the fastening, each detail of which I then more carefully examined—all the while in a fever of anxiety lest some chance custodian of the place should come along and find me there. The fastening was, so far as I could ascertain in the darkness, composed of a long iron rod, headed at the top end, dropped through a succession of strong eyes of the same metal, alternately secured to each shutter, the rod being held in place by a stout pliable wire being rove through an eye in at its bottom end. All this had, no doubt, been done during my first few minutes in the hollow god. This discovery was a stunning blow to my hopes of gaining freedom *viâ* the window. I stood back a pace, quite aghast at my position. To this moment I had looked forward as the time when I should issue from danger to safety, chuckling over my escapade. Now, however, I saw myself in a worse plight than ever, and once again cursed the inherent curiosity that had led me into the muddle. In my pocket was an ordinary sailor's clasp-knife, and with this I began a series of futile operations on the barrier to my egress. After vainly trying to remove the eyes

from the shutters, I thought of sawing through the wire; but, under some mystic influence, left it severely alone and turned again to the eyes above. I might as well have endeavoured to burgle the Bank of England with a lady's penknife. Moreover, all my actions had to be done in absolute silence and with the utmost dispatch.

Then came a new idea, at first rapturous in its possibilities. The wire ran right and left, farther than I could reach. What if I followed it and gained safety by its means?—as I had read of Theseus doing with a silken thread in the famous Labyrinth of Crete. At any rate, to remain there would be the height of stupidity; to seek freedom elsewhere was but natural. Accordingly, I placed my right hand on the wire and moved carefully along by its side, presently to find myself stopped by a wall through which the wire apparently continued. Realizing how precious the fleeing moments were becoming to me, I turned about, changed hands on the wire, retraced my steps, passed the window, arrived at another secured in the same manner, and at length found myself traversing a corridor—the one, I imagined, along which the devotees had gone when leaving the presence of the god. Now was the time for redoubled alertness. On what should I emerge—freedom or worse danger? My senses again became acutely keen to all outward matters. Snail-like in movement, each foot was lifted up and put down with a care for which I should not previously have given myself credit. In the same manner my hand went along the wire, which was supported here and there by a staple in the wall. I took infinite care not to put an ounce of weight on it. From the passage I entered another room, passed a window fastened as the others were, and began to thread a second corridor. During all this time I heard no noise and saw not the faintest glint of a light. I began to think that the building was untenanted save for myself and that repulsive

idol behind me. What a glorious upshot to the affair if such should be the case! I could then effect an exit in comfort.

So ran my thoughts as I trod slowly forward, gained a turn in the passage, and came full upon a lighted room not more than ten feet away. Certainly the light was not great, and it was apparently produced by a lamp placed so that its beams, unintentionally or otherwise, did not penetrate the corridor. Instantly my hand left the wire and I halted. What was before me now? To know that, what would I not have given! Should I go on, or turn and make all possible haste back? I stood there in doubt. Behind me lay certain imprisonment till daylight, if nothing worse. Before me—what? Perhaps a quiet egress, which would be lost if I returned. At least I could creep forward and see what the room held. All was in absolute silence as I crawled on. Arrived at the end of the passage I took a hasty glance beyond, and saw one of the two priests squatting on the floor asleep, his head against a wall. Mechanically I edged backwards. When again at the turn in the passage I stopped, brought to a standstill by the recollection that across the lighted room I had seen an open doorway. Whither did it lead? Could I reach it safely and gain an outlet that way? Was it worth while to take the greater risk of awaking that sleeping priest? These were the thoughts occupying my brain as I stood there in new uncertainty. The situation lent me a courage which, I am not ashamed to say, had deserted me in the face of what I had just experienced. Again my steps were directed forward. I was determined to get out of the place if possible. Just within the end of the corridor I drew up to make a full survey of the room. I discovered that the sleeping priest, the opposite doorway, and a few objects of no interest were the only things there. I was about to draw back and debate afresh

whether to go back or press onward when an old English naval cutlass attracted my attention. It lay on the floor by the wall, some three feet to my right, and still seemed capable of doing good service. If I could only get hold of it! Then the priest *might* wake and be hanged for all I cared, providing he did not call help.

Down I stooped, right at the corner of the passage, and reached towards that much-coveted object. Once the sleeper moved. With the speed of wind in squally March I was back in the corridor, breathing hard. I waited, listening keenly. All was still. I took another peep. He slept peacefully, maybe dreaming that the repellent god had many blessings in store for him. Again I essayed the cutlass, this time taking a short pace into the room before reaching for it. Result: I arose feeling twenty times my former self. Forward I stole, still noiseless as before; yet, owing to the cutlass, not under the same severe tension of feeling. The doorway was safely gained, and I found myself in another corridor, which I carefully examined for wires, but discovered none. On I pressed and very soon found myself in a small, square room with a door that apparently opened on to the street, or at least out of the building; for the gleam of a gas-lamp was to be seen through a tiny chink or crack in the door. Thinking that I had at last reached the end of my imprisonment, I began to pass my hands over the fastenings of the barrier—only to find that here I was again baulked of escape. It was locked and the key gone! Having ascertained this miserable truth I noted every other detail of the fastenings. They were more than I could have managed to overcome under the circumstances, even if there had been no lock on the door. I spent a long time in reviewing my position, seeing it, I think, from every possible standpoint, and finally concluded that my best course of action was one of quiet waiting on the spot—provided I

could find a hiding-place—till the door should be opened after daybreak. I began to search for a retreat, and at length I stowed myself away in what seemed to be a recess partially screened off by a pile of things which I was chary of touching lest they played traitor on me by a fall. With what awful slowness the time dragged till daylight struggled through an oblong slit of a window up near the ceiling opposite to where I crouched! Yet I had no temptation to sleep, nor did I feel hungry. When the day had broken I momentarily expected the coming of my unwitting gaoler, each minute appearing an hour, each hour a lifetime, till my young nerves seemed about to break under the strain of expectancy. I put on my shoes ready for emerging. When at last he *did* come, however, all my weariness of tension passed away in an instant. Mind and muscle were alike alert. Narrowly, in the dim light, I watched him move, with patience-killing leisure, to the door. One by one, as if he had all time and half eternity for the task, he cast off the fastenings and drew the door wide open. Then he stood there—a tall, bony, middle-aged embodiment of exasperation, his black-brown legs protruding far beneath the light creamy piece of stuff wound about his loins and thrown over one shoulder. He was drinking in the fresh morning air and quietly stretching himself withal. I could have gone up behind and impatiently hurled him into the street out of my way, for the door happily opened off a public thoroughfare and near the banana-tree. In fact, I was about to do so, thinking that he might refasten the door after thus filling his lungs, when good fortune for once kindly played into my hands.

Suddenly there was a burst of noise outside, and the stolid priest became alert. Two native and one white policemen led a couple of prisoners past, followed by a crowd of Hindu and European men and youths. Quick

came the thought : Here's my chance ! The cutlass was quietly laid down, ready for a spring, when the priest suddenly turned about and hurried inwards, what for I could not tell. Hardly had he gained the first room, however, when I leapt into the street, just in time to dash into the tail-end of the crowd and work my way through to some Europeans near the opposite side. I did not look back. Whether my action had been noticed by others I knew not; enough I was free, and troubled about nothing else until I was at a good breakfast at the Royal Oak and thinking : What if, after all, I was in no danger ? Why should not those priests have let me go unharmed, if they had found me, without knowing that I had desecrated their god ? But, no—I would have none of this reasoning. I had been in danger, I told myself—great danger, and there the matter must remain. This was a real adventure, and sceptical arguments should not rob it of a scrap of its importance. Whether the house was some worshipping-place of a secret or semi-secret sect of Hinduism or not I cannot tell. Naturally, I religiously refrained from asking any questions there about the place, and on my subsequent visits to Bombay I passed it by while seeming to look straight ahead only.

CHAPTER IV

Shells and explanations—Selling and buying—Homeward-bound—
At Suez—Three seamen in an orange grove—Surprised—A
“Turk’s” pig—A houri and another—Fascinated—The “Turk”
to the rescue—Freedom by a trick—More Eastern glamour—
Good-bye, Jenny—A murder—Home again—I join the R.N.R.—
Competing for a badge—A Baltic summer.

WHILE I sat at Parsee George’s table my thoughts naturally went to Shells, as they had done, off and on, since midnight. I wondered all sorts of things about him and his doings after he discovered that I was missing. Where should I find him? What had I better do—go aboard, or traverse the ground, if I could find it, which we covered on the previous night? I was half-way through the big meal, when in walked Shells, yawning, and somewhat tumbled in his appearance. Surprise and explanations came and went quickly. When he missed me, he turned back, the strangers with him a while, seeking me wherever we had been, but making no fuss. Commotion was not in his nature. When the other men left him, saying the inherent and unlovely things about me which would have been true of themselves under the same circumstances, he continued till daybreak. Then he went to the Royal Oak, paid for a “shake-down,” and had a short watch-in, preparatory to resuming his hunt. He joined in the meal. I told him my adventure, was duly lectured in that brief, quiet way of his; then we returned on board, and slept soundly till “plum-duff” was announced. The afternoon went in getting as near as we could to the Towers of Silence. I wanted to go across to the

Caves of Elephanta; but lack of time prevented us. In the evening Shells helped me to get ashore nearly all my books, which had been read and were no longer needed; and with his assistance I bartered them away for "curios," there being a good market for second-hand English literature at the barracks. The next two evenings were occupied with bringing my "Journal" up to date and writing letters for shipmates. Before another week-end came along we had discharged our sugar, gone into the dock and loaded up with raw cotton, seeds, buffalo-horns, etc., and were away for Havre—as we thought. I had given two rupees for as pretty a little iron-grey thing as a monkey could be; and, while we were crossing the Indian Ocean, my Swedish watch-mate taught Jenny some tricks. In the meantime I made her a suit of navy serge trousers and jumper, and a red flannel cap, with a white band to pass under her chin.

At Suez, however, we were pulled up "for orders." This was in the forenoon. Just after dinner, when the *Algitha* was swinging with her stern towards Mount Sinai, and the sun was melting pitch wherever it could get at the black stuff, the "old man" ordered out his gig. Mr. S——, Mason (a north country, fat A.B.), the Swede, a Bristolian and I made up the crew who took our captain to smoke and gossip with the ship's agent and consul, by way of varying the monotony of life at anchor. The moment the skipper was out of sight Mr. S—— lit his pipe, gave us leave to do the same, then said to me—

"Now 'Skyrocket,' slip off and spy out the land. See if it has any good things to spare; but don't go far, nor get yourself into any so-so mischief. If the skipper comes in sight I'll whistle 'The Anchor's Weighed,' like a donkey-engine; then you bolt back. Now skip!"

Among the date-palms, cactus plants, etc., I went, and presently came across a beautiful grove of fruit-

trees, apparently quite deserted. I promptly returned and reported my discovery to Mr. S——, whereupon a consultation was held. A spirit of humorous devilry seemed to have taken possession of our officer, and it soon infected the Bristolian and me. The captain would probably not return before sundown, so Mr. S——, Mason and I set off with the laudable object of stripping the orchard of as much fruit as we could carry. I felt all the easier in mind for being under official protection, in the person of Mr. S——.

Soon our way was barred by a fence of stakes, bushes, and climbing plants, enclosing the grove of fruit-trees which I had discovered.

"Now, 'Skyrocket,'" said our officer softly, "get to work." Between him and myself there existed a kind of mental telepathy, especially when engaged in a piece of mischief, so I at once commenced scouting both for observers and an easy way into the grove.

After a time I found a low part of the fence opposite an incline. Mr. S—— took the run, made a successful leap, and landed in the grove. I followed; but when it came to our ungainly shipmate's turn he made several ludicrous attempts to jump the hedge, amid a rich flow of ejaculations from the lips of the officer. At last he came over, landing in a jumbled heap on the ground. He had crashed through the upper part of the fence, getting his foot entangled in it.

Now we quickly selected trees bearing ripe fruit. At the order of Mr. S——, Mason pulled off his jersey and made a sack of it by tying up the bottom with a piece of rope-yarn; I did the same with mine. Meanwhile, our leader stripped himself of a clean white shirt, and served it in a like unceremonious manner. Presently we were all busy. Mason, by Mr. S——'s instructions, climbed up a banana-tree between us and a house which we had now seen at the other end of the grove; while we two got

to work unloading orange-trees. In a while Mason came running along, his full jersey cuddled in his arms. "Mr. S——!" he said, in a startled undertone, "Mr. S——, there's two Turks coming down the orchard from the house! Look!" He turned and pointed to a couple of forms, indistinctly seen, approaching on the opposite side of some tall, thin bushes.

"The devil!" cried our leader. "You're right for once in your life. Come on, both of you!" Snatching up his almost bursting shirt, the second officer darted off down the grove, with us two following at his heels, until brought to an abrupt halt by a transverse hedge similar to the one we had jumped. There was no time here to make leaps, and breaking through the barrier would have made a noise, so Mr. S—— turned sharply to his right and resumed the run. We followed, expecting at every moment to hear cries of alarm. Luck, however, led us aright, and we came upon an opening into a small separate enclosure containing a cluster of high, thick shrubs, with a wooden structure in their midst.

"Here we are," muttered the officer, making direct for the place of refuge. "Into this while the interlopers clear out. I'm not going from here for anybody until I've got a full load!" He had evidently forgotten the captain, as entirely as we had. A small door, secured on the outside by a wooden latch, let us into a tiny courtyard. "Tumble in, you lump of hesitation," said Mr. S—— to Mason, as the latter paused on the threshold to look back, and almost knocked my hurrying self over. "Now," he added, after refastening the door, "in here, and mum's the word." With that he gripped his load in both arms against his chest, stooped low, and entered the doorway of the hut, followed by me and Mason—to find ourselves in the presence of a fine piebald pig.

"Well, who in thunder would have thought of this?" was Mr. S——'s incautious remark, as he dropped on

some dry leaves in a corner and fixed a look on the animal; which sat up on its haunches at the opposite side of the place and began to watch us, through the semi-darkness, with a pair of twinkling, interrogatory eyes. "If this orchard belongs to a Turk, here's the old renegade secretly feeding his Mohammedan stomach on pork! If he gives us any trouble now, may I be shot if we don't run him and the pig down to the nearest mosque and get him excommunicated before he sleeps again!"

Silence followed this emphatic threat. Some minutes were spent in scarcely audible conversation, during which came a few anxious speculations concerning the captain. Down our parched throats went some of the fruit, the skins of which were generously thrown to the pig as bribes to keep him quiet. Finally Mr. S——'s impatience grew too heavy for him. Inaction was giving him time to think, and fears that the captain would return to the waiting boat before us were growing on him. Accordingly he stole quietly out to see if the coast was clear, with me at his heels, for I did not like the thought of being caught like a rat in a trap. With the utmost caution we peered over the tops of the boards forming the pig's promenade. There was nothing in sight to prevent a further venture.

"Come along, 'Skyrocket,' let's have a look round," said the officer, and out we went, first securing the door to keep the pig from betraying us by wandering forth. Bent almost double, so that we should not be seen over the hedge, we crept across to that part of it which stood between us and the grove proper. There the same careful uprising took place. But we had barely straightened our backs when we heard voices. Down we doubled again, as, although ripe for well-nigh any mischief, we had no desire to be hauled before an *effendi*. The better to hide ourselves, we stole noiselessly along to a thicker bush and there lay down and listened.

The tones were certainly those of females, and drawing nearer; but, for all we knew to the contrary, the language might have been Volapuk. Presently Mr. S—— motioned that the speakers were pacing to and fro on the other side of the fence. I listened, then nodded an assent. Soft voices were to both of us what the magnetic north was to the needle of the *Algitha's* compass, and the charm was beginning to work, especially on my leader. Up he rose, his body horizontal, and silently followed the almost invisible strangers, with me still close behind him. They halted. We did the same, trying our hardest to distinguish what was being said. We failed, however, gave up the task in despair, then began to hunger for a sight of the speakers, acting almost all the time as if we were moved by one set of muscles.

Once more we cautiously straightened ourselves until we saw, through a thin part of the hedge, two Mohammedan women with their veils on. "Confound these face-screens," whispered the officer. Scarcely had he uttered the words when the one who stood farther away took off her *yashmak*, did something to it, then replaced it, but not before we had been granted several minutes' rapt study of her young and really beautiful face. Again they moved on. Mr. S—— merely turned round and followed, with me two steps behind his stooping figure. We had forgotten the fruit, the existence of our companion, and the *Algitha* and her master. On two or three occasions we even caught ourselves walking almost erect. If the women had only looked back they must have seen us at one or other of the thin places in the hedge. Again they stopped, this time within three feet of the opening by which we had entered the separate enclosure. At the moment of their halting the owner of the older voice was talking so earnestly that they did not see or hear us steal past them. By the bushy end of the hedge we paused. Mr. S—— seemed to have quite

forgotten me, and I remembered him only because of his being in front. Just as we halted, something again went wrong with the younger woman's veil, causing another removal and readjustment. To us that action was as the clenching of a nail. As one man we stepped forward, Mr. S—— giving a slight apologetic cough by way of introduction. But the ladies did not understand the language of an English cough, nor did my straight gaze at the tantalizing veils reassure them. They turned towards us, then moved quickly backwards, giving vent to two half-smothered cries of fear. I stood still, awaiting my leader's initiative. He did not keep me long in suspense. He thrust out his hands in an attitude of supplication, whilst on his face there appeared an expression that was highly ludicrous to one who knew him—it was so imploring, so humorous, yet so natural. The two women before us were undoubtedly interested by his general appearance, a fact that was obvious from their bearing.

"Oh, lamps of Mohammed!" cried Mr. S——, with a gesture worthy of an Adelphi hero, "the great mighty Mohammed, the Mogul of the Mohammeds! Lights of the stars of the harem! Houri of Para—Paradi——!" Then to me in a fierce whisper, but still looking at them, "'Skyrocket,' what the dickens is Turkish for 'Paradise'?"

I shook my head, for I could not trust myself to speak. The younger woman laid a restraining hand on the other's arm, and by the twinkling of her bright dark eyes we could see that she was anything but insensible to the humours of the situation.

"Oh, houri," said I, carried away by Mr. S——'s manner, "please show us your face again!"

"Here, 'Skyrocket,' I'm officer of *this* watch!" my chief interrupted, in a tone of humorous reproof; then he continued his extraordinary harangue. "Oh, Zuleika,

Fatima, or—what is your name?” But neither of them made reply, either by word or gesture. “Your cheeks are redder than the roses in Bombay market,” Mr. S—— continued, in nowise embarrassed. “Your teeth are whiter than your skin, and that beats the front of a new white go-ashore shirt! And—— The devil!” he muttered to me, “but my phrase-locker is pretty nearly empty. I’d pawn my certificate to be able to talk twenty minutes of Turkish just now! Can’t you help me, ‘Sky-rocket’? Where’s all your book-learning now?”

My only answer was to continue gazing abstractedly at that annoying *yashmak*.

It now became apparent that the younger woman was quietly laughing under the cover of her face-cloth. My private opinion was that she had at least enough English to understand what we said. At that moment the older woman gave a little shriek. Intuitively we turned our faces in the direction she was looking—towards the house—and saw a Turk issuing from an adjacent clump of orange-trees, hastening our way as fast as his fat legs would carry him.

Like sheep at the onrush of a wolf, the women turned and fled along what was probably a circuitous path leading to the house, each holding the other’s hand, until they disappeared around a corner, a fluttering mass of baggy skirt-breeches and streaming veils. The Turk, now shouting and gesticulating wildly, came on at us. To collide with the enemy might prove being kept till help arrived; and, again, we had no desire to be dragged before the local *effendi*. Then, there was the captain! Round spun Mr. S——, me after him, and we made unceremoniously for the pig-sty. Barely were we inside when Mr. S—— whispered in loud vehemence: “Hi, there, Mason!”

“Yes, sir,” replied the latter; our leader having paused

and stooped low, imitated by me, inside the outer door.

"Turn out that porker; smart now! Out with him, and give him a kick as he comes."

Scarcely was the order given when out came the pig, pushed by Mason, and grunting vigorously. The officer held the door open, and, as the pig passed me, I gave him a tiny dig with my sheath-knife. A squeal and a bound were the immediate results. Mason made to give the pig another prod, but he had gone. The animal, squealing viciously, sped off. We peeped over the edge of the sty to see how the plot worked, for on its proper evolution lay the successful issue of our risky enterprise. Around the end of the fence, blustering, came the Turk, just as the pig approached. Before the Turk could move aside, the pig dashed between his legs; and, with a wild yell, he went backwards on to the animal, which shrieked and struggled to get from under its heavy load. The Turk gasped and evidently swore, rolling over on one side, while the pig made off at a tangent. Its owner scrambled hastily to his feet, and ran puffing along in its wake.

This was exactly what we wanted. Mr. S——, sharing in our choked merriment, said sharply, "Now, up with your sacks, boys, and make tracks after me as fast as you can. We can't stop to see any more of this Oriental pantomime, though I should very much like to."

Without another word, our "sacks" in our arms, we started at a run for the nearest part of the outer fence. Mr. S—— made for a weak place in the barrier, reached it, and broke through regardless of torn clothes and scratches, and we darted after him. The moment we were outside, fresh cries from the Turk attracted our attention to the extent of making us turn to ascertain the cause. The scene we beheld was screamingly ludicrous.

The poor Turk was lying flat on his stomach, his turban in his right hand, his left gripping one of the pig's hind legs, and his bald head the stopping-block of much sandy earth sent backwards by the three remaining feet in their wild struggle for freedom. Meanwhile, the pig was squealing in a most disconcerting fashion.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Mr. S—— aloud; "the old rogue will relish his pork if he thinks of this when he eats it!"

So saying, we turned about and made the best of our way back to the boat, to find that the "old man" had been waiting ten minutes for us, and that we were all in for a severe reprimand. The skipper, however, did not mind confiscating two bundles of fruit for "cabin use." That was the end of our raid.

As for our getting into no trouble over the affair, although the "old man" repeatedly told us on the way aboard that "it would cost us each a pound or two," in the evening we learnt from the second-mate—he having been told by the captain—that our "Turk" was an eccentric Greek who had married two Egyptian women, loosely adopted some of the tenets of Islamism; but could not sufficiently forswear savoury pork to become a devout follower of the prophet; at the same time he strove to keep the desecrating animal from the offended eyes and noses of his Mohammedan neighbours. He was a "character" in the place, and that very afternoon the agent had entertained our "old man" with some of the doings of this "Turk." On the following morning we were away again, with our port of destination changed from Havre to Dunkirk.

Our passage through the Canal was marked by nothing more eventful than a lift for me off the fore-castle-head into the stream, by the bight of a taut line breaking from its snatch-block whilst we were heaving the *Algitha* to her moorings. Owing to my being close

to the bow and no railings up at the time, I suffered no worse than a severe bruise and a needed dip in the cooling water. Half-an-hour later I was at the mast-head, watching a camel-train wind its slow way over the gloaming-shrouded country, a little east of where we lay. Ah, what a wealth of vague, Eastern tales there were in that string of laden camels!—and all without beginnings, ends or shapes. There I was seen by the “old man,” who said to Mr. S——, “There can’t be much the matter with his hull or spars, or he would be in his bunk, instead of looking for sore-eyed Arabs up there.” Wherefore I had to continue at work, in place of the two days’ rest eminently predicted for me by my shipmates.

At Malta we coaled; and there, so much against my wish that the parting caused me a few sad hours and made more than me feel as if we had lost a shipmate, I parted with Jenny. To this day I can see the poor little thing striving to get back, as she was carried away by a Maltese. If I had brought her home, the cold would have killed her.

In Dunkirk it fell to my lot to see a man done to death in a fracas; but the end was a sharp one, although we knew it not at the time. Shells, Oscar—the Swede, that is—and I were in a free-and-easy by the quay, a place that catered largely for British seamen and to which we went almost nightly, because of the songs and music. One night there was a sudden hubbub near the other end of the long room. Some Frenchmen were quarrelling, and one of them abruptly swung a chair aloft, bringing one leg down on the other man’s skull. The latter dropped like a felled ox, and the leg broke off the chair. A crowd gathered around; but ere we could get near the victim, some *gendarmes* entered and took away both him and his assailant. Before we were allowed to leave the place our names and that of our

ship were taken down by the police. On the following day we, learning that the man was dead, were examined by the authorities and permitted to depart. As Shells said, it was fortunate for us that we were not near the trouble, or we should probably not have left Dunkirk in the *Algitha*; which we did, for the Thames, a few days later.

Shells was for remaining in the vessel and going out East again; but I wanted to go elsewhere. So he and I went back to the Humber, he to Hull, I to Grimsby, and each of us to communicate with the other before shipping again. It was a great return!—travelled and curio-laden, to that intensely English family to whom everything outside the British Isles was foreign indeed, and who had made me so much one of themselves. Willy-nilly, I could not avoid comparing it with home-returns elsewhere. It was an occasion that made an abiding impression in a heart that had, perhaps, been overmuch starved in the matter of affection.

After a week or so of idleness and healthy, homely pleasures, I cast about for some new experience, and found one in joining the Royal Naval Reserve. I liked smartness, wanted to learn the use of arms, knew that R.N.R. on my papers would be of service under the Red Ensign, was of the opinion that every able-bodied man should know how to defend his hearth and home, expected to be still some years at sea—so came my entry to this branch of the Auxiliary Forces. Immediately on joining, I found men who wore a certain anchor-badge and were allowed to dress in civilian clothes, except for their caps. These, I learnt, were "First Class" men, with years of service, who had passed an examination in gunnery. Well, I, too, could work up for that. It was not to be done in a month's training, said the sympathetically interested instructor—at least, he feared not. Having ascertained what the examination consisted of, I

declared my ability to get through all right. So the matter was arranged, and when the venture became known, some of the old hands joined the instructor in his seriously-adopted experiment, particularly a tough old salt who had been in the naval side of the Crimean War, and was so tall, straight, thin, and devoid of nonsense as constantly to remind me of my grandfather. It was owing to his tuition in cutlass-drill and single-stick, and to a bet he made, that a bumptious young fellow and I fought a big fight with single-sticks. My opponent was considerably heavier and stronger than I; but, although he broke a stick on my head, he lacked the lightness and smartness which were necessary to make him the winner, and my old tutor to lose his bet.

On the examination day the Commander of the gun-boat, who, along with his officers, was keenly interested in the matter, staggered us all—when we went to big-gun exercise, where I should have acted as captain of the gun—by falling me out to drill the guns' crews! In other words, I was to be the instructor! For a minute I was quite nonplussed. Then the gunner, who was close by, whispered a few cheering words. The order to commence was given, and at it we went. I made three mistakes in the four exercises—the entire big-gun work. When all was over the worst of the whole affair came on—*i. e.* the ship's company and the R.N.R. were mustered aft; I was ordered to stand one pace forward, and the Commander—who had sprung his surprise upon us in order to ascertain if my knowledge was thorough—delivered a little homily that made me wish the decks would open and swallow me. On the dispersal of all hands, he, the sub-lieutenant and the elderly boatswain each tried his persuasive powers, and each with a personal offer from his own pocket, to make me join the service and go in for gunnery. But, no; my plan of life led elsewhere. Besides, I had served one term of years,

and that was quite enough in the lifetime of a temperament like mine. My passing the examination on the first training—not an entirely new thing—did not get me the coveted badge, however. To grant such was against the rules of the Service; so I had to comply, and wait till the end of another training, then pass again.

A week later Shells sent word that he was shipping for the Baltic, in another steam "tramp," and had bespoken an A.B.'s berth for me. Hence to Cronstaedt we went. When going past Elsinore I was duly impressed that "that was Hamlet's castle." But the "Dobra Market" in the Russian port was of far greater interest to me. It was a Slavonic edition of the old-time Petticoat Lane on a Sunday morning, and one of quite a number that are to be found here and there in large ports from Archangel south and east to Yokohama, or west to "'Frisco," and all of which are held on the morning of the Christian Sabbath. Shells and I spent that summer in Baltic voyages, during which time I dropped my German, and tried to pick up a little Russian and Scandinavian, but kept up my reading. Then, immediately after a late and unusually bad passage down the Gulf of Finland—during which there happened a supernatural occurrence that could be related here, but few persons would believe it—we mutually agreed to go East again.

CHAPTER V

In Bombay again—We join a coasting brig—An ugly customer—Caught red-handed—A unique offer—Pirate *versus* shark—A thrilling combat—Betrayed!—Two wounded—Imprisoned desperadoes—A Yankee trick—Fearful waiting—A dash from sulphur—The pirate's leap.

WE were in West Hartlepool when the decision was made to go farther a-sea again, and there we signed on in another steam "tramp," bound direct to Bombay; but, to my sorrow, Shells had to go as an A.B., because the bo'sun's berth was already filled, and we could not find a craft that would suit us in this respect. Beyond some trouble between one of the stokers and me, there was nothing in that passage nor in our shipmates to call for comment. On our first going ashore—with no more than a brief allusion to my god-house experience—we made at once for Parsee George's establishment.

Later in the evening, however, we went with another Englishman to a house called The British Flag—a finer and more "slap-up" affair than the Royal Oak was, and apparently a rendezvous for mercantile officers. There we happened to sit at a table where there was only a short, wiry man with a burnt-up skin, a straggling mouse-coloured beard and whiskers touched with a gingery hue, a pair of small, darting eyes, and a big nose that had once been broken at the bridge. He wore a short nankeen jacket over a "soft" American shirt, a blue tie loosely knotted under the collar of the shirt, and his head was covered with a "toby" that reached down the nape of his neck. After Shells had given our order

to the native waiter, to whom he had to make some explanations about mixing and icing, I noticed that the stranger was keenly eyeing my friend, who had a good smattering of Hindustani, and liked to be in the East partially for that reason.

Presently, when our other companion had left us, the man with the big nose began to talk to Shells, the upshot being a tempting offer to the latter to join the other's coasting brig as a sort of bo'sun-second-mate. He had been in such a berth before, and I could see that he was strongly inclined to accept the offer; but—and he looked at me. Knowing what this meant, I insisted that he should go without me—unless the captain would take me also. At this I was subjected to a short, sharp scrutiny by those small eyes of his. Yes, he would take me too—if—. Then came a few necessary questions as to my seamanship; these were satisfactorily answered, and details of pay and trans-shipment were arranged over drinks paid for by our new master, whom we rightly judged to be a Scandinavian, and who gave not the slightest heed to the fact that he was breaking the law as to crimping. At the end of it all Shells asked, his eyes showing one of those quiet twinkles of his, if I was aware that there were "pirates down yonder"—meaning along the coast. No, said I; but I should like to look on a real live pirate—he was sure to be interesting; I was abroad for experiences, and if they didn't come I should have to make some, because the time was bound to arrive when they would be wanted. At this Shells joked me, as he had often done, on that persistent faith of mine, and the master of the brig gave me another sharp look—no doubt wondering what on earth he had shipped as a sort of saddling condition to his getting the capable white bo'sun for whom, we afterwards discovered, he had already been detained a week. Shells then asked how it would affect my R.N.R. cer-

tificate. Not at all, said I. It was a new thing which I had forgotten to have signed when joining the steamer.

Shortly afterwards the skipper left us. Then Shells and I went aboard the steamer and made our preparations, having the fo'c'sle to ourselves. After this we turned in, me to lie and read till midnight, when I awoke Shells, and he kept a look-out until two o'clock, while I got a short sleep. It was at this hour that the *Mary Grace's* boat dropped silently alongside and received our bags—my books and trunk had to be abandoned—we followed, were pulled to the brig, which lay a little farther out in the bay, and an hour later Bombay was left astern. With the north-east monsoon about three points abaft our port beam, a fine run was made to Mangalore. By this time Shells and I had found ourselves comfortably shipped, and in nowise sorry at leaving the steamer and losing half-a-month's pay. But there was in store for us something that changed this opinion. At Mangalore four of our native seamen left. In their place came a foul-visaged, cross-eyed, lath-like specimen of his kind, in the prime of life; one who had probably spent the greater part of his existence in robbery afloat and ashore—he and three others, three scoundrels lesser in degree. He turned out to be their chief, shorn of whose leadership they lacked nerve and resource enough to act for themselves.

We left that port with some coal and a fill-up of general cargo for Negapatam and other ports up the bay. One dark night, some fifty miles south of Cochin, he was caught putting over the lee-bow a partially-shrouded signal-light to their pirate-confederates on shore—as we subsequently knew the light to be. His three more immediate companions in crime remained unobserved in the darkness, and—as was afterwards found out—scuttled away, and were unsuspected of complicity in this affair until their villainous leader had

treated us to his unique bid for freedom and possession of the brig. A smart breeze, and a stand of serviceable Sniders distributed amongst our whites, enabled us to keep the pirates off and get safely away. In the act of guiding his fellows, the chief had been knocked senseless by a big, keen, middle-aged Irishman who acted as a carpenter-seaman; and who, along with a young American mate, made up our five white men. Paddy had happened to come barefooted from the below-deck-fo'c'sle just as the light was going over the side, and knew what it meant. What this was to me I leave the reader to imagine, and hasten to relate the adventure which followed.

Without further mishap we fetched Cape Cormorin, and were contentedly wasting the hours of a beautiful Sunday in a dead calm. About four bells in the afternoon watch a big, ugly shark appeared some three fathoms off our port side, well aft. There he floated, lazily basking in the warmth, his dorsal fin now above the surface, now a hand's breadth below. It was sickening to see the cool devilishness of his insolent movements. Our Cingalese cook-steward threw several lumps of coal at him, as the fin stuck up high and dry, yet he took small notice of them. The mate was for baiting a shark-hook with a lump of fat pork, the skipper for trying a Snider bullet on him. But our pirate saw in him a way of escape from the penal establishment of Andaman—and a prize to boot, if his plot proved successful. He, still ironed, was secured by a line close to the port rail; this was so that he should not fall sick and cheat justice by a too narrow confinement below, nor elude his proper deserts by a leap over the side. He had watched the shark a while, listening to the skipper and mate above him. When they spoke of catching or shooting the fish, he asked to be allowed to fight it with a sheath-knife—freedom to be his reward

if he won; if he lost—well, in that case he pointed out that he would be off their hands and give them no further trouble.

It was a novel and daring suggestion. Hardened though the skipper was, this offer took all the wind out of his mental sails and set him in a verbal calm. The thought never entered his head that underlying it all was a devilish trick, a purpose that meant death to every white man aboard. The mate said he had heard of blacks fighting sharks as a common thing, and very rarely getting the worst of the battle. Perhaps, he said, this fellow had many a time done the same thing. It certainly seemed to be no more to him than a bout with fists would be to the average A.B.

At last sanction was given, and the news flew through the brig. Every man fore and aft dropped the thing in hand, most of them to watch the fight, but three for a more sinister reason. Those who had been asleep leapt on deck, and the sheath-knives of all hands were brought to a muster. Of these the man was allowed to make his choice, and the one selected was put on the grindstone. Meanwhile the gladiator was prepared by being cast adrift from the rail and having his leg-irons taken off. The skipper brought out a Snider and put a ball-cartridge into it, at the same time telling the pirate that the bullet was for him should he attempt any such tricks as running amok when he had the knife and stood free.

Five minutes later the man, completely stripped, was on the rail, covered by the skipper's Snider. His wrist-irons were off; the knife was in his hand, and his opponent still basked idly near the surface about six fathoms away. It was to be a fight to the death, or driving the shark off completely—so we, in our ignorance of the plot afloat, were given to understand. The human antagonist had been permitted to grease himself with

pork-fat from heel to crown, in order that the water might offer less resistance to his movements—in itself that fat was a most clinching proof of his hopelessly renegade condition, for he was a Mohammedan. Not a tremor marked him in face or limb. He was playing for a big stake, much bigger than we thought. Old at the frightful game or new at it, going to his death between those triple rows of horrible teeth or to victory and freedom, he fully won the silent applause of every white man there—even although he had attempted to give us over to the merciless hands of his kind.

The end of a brace had been lowered to the water's edge, and the brace was belayed to a pin in the rail. Down this line the pirate slid. Every man crept to the rail and craned his neck over it, forward of all else being the three compatriots of the shark-fighter. Owing to their having held themselves generally aloof from the rest of their shipmates, and to the fact that crews usually go in cliques, we did not think their actions strange—did not even notice them now, so much was our attention fascinated by the enthralling scene before us. Yet we afterwards called the matter to mind and saw its special why and wherefore. The challenger entered the water without causing the least noise. Just before his head went in he took the keen six-inch blade from his mouth, and it was at that brief instant we saw the set, grim look on his dark, ugly, greasy face. Then down he sank. He was gone so long that we thought he had drowned himself. Never was man more wronged! Whilst we were thus watching, we saw the shark's little pilot fish darting excitedly about his master's great head. But the eighteen-footer merely came a few yards nearer to the brig. Perhaps content in his superiority of size, strength, and mastership, he lay there, barely moving. Then the captain raised the rifle to give him a repentant

bullet, but lowered it again without doing so—we the while hardly cognizant of the act, so absorbed was every pair of eyes that could get above the rail.

How those seconds dragged! In our minds we had wished the shark-fighter an everlasting good-bye, deeming him a clever fellow to have escaped the Andamans in such a manner. Then came a hurried whisper, "He's there!" Ere the news could be passed fore and aft, we saw the upward flash of a black body and a gleaming knife in the blue water directly under the shark; they seemed to have been driven up by some powerful force. The next moment the shark shot clear into the air, like a porpoise or flying-fish. As he went, blood dyed the surface under him, and we saw that there was a great wound in his stomach. The pirate appeared above the water, gasping, yet only for about half-a-minute. He moved into the clearer, stiller water farther off, where he again disappeared. We watched here, there, everywhere, within a cable's length, but did not have long to wait.

"Here he comes!" shouted the mate, silence being now out of the question.

There they were, scarcely three fathoms away. At the moment in which we saw them, the shark was in the act of diving, and his great cross-ended tail was out of the water, showing on one side a gash that had reached the backbone. Plainly the pirate's intention now was to bleed the fish to death by tapping the spinal artery, and in the meantime rob him of his second-best weapon. Before we could wonder whether the shark would turn or go under us he had dived, leaving the panting gladiator at the surface of the troubled waters. Now it was that the three other pirates were missing from the place they had occupied just abaft the fore-rigging. Not that we knowingly missed them. Our conception of the matter was merely by way of instinct; we knew it

vaguely yet correctly, as was afterwards proved when the affair was discussed in detail.

"Throw him a line!" cried the captain, willing to spare the man further risk.

There was a rush to obey the order, but ere a line could be thrown the pirate was off into quieter water, the better to see his foe returning to the attack—should he come. There the man remained for some minutes, now sinking to reconnoitre, then on the surface filling his lungs, never still; for in quietude now lay his greatest danger. We were thinking and hoping that the finned-tiger had been beaten, when the cook gave a warning cry that he was slowly coming back. There he was, rising slowly, as if almost spent—as well he might be; but the tiger of the seas dies a terribly hard death, as all deep-water seamen know. We again gave the shark-fighter notice of his adversary's return and the details of it, never dreaming that our shouted warnings were so many signals of preparation to the swarthy scoundrels who were even then making ready to send us hurrying prematurely into eternity. The shark-fighter struck off for the brig's head. So fast a swimmer was he, that in a very few minutes after disappearing forward he had passed along the starboard side and rounded the vessel's stern to take the dying shark in rear.

Bang! rang out a rifle from we knew not where, and the mate, standing in the fore-starboard corner of the poop, gave a cry of pain and gripped the rail at his side. For all we knew or could imagine to the contrary the bullet might have come from the still, inflexible blue overhead. Instantly a newer, a madder, a more desperate hurly-burly began, in which the pirate in the water, together with his vanquished foe, was forgotten. All, actuated by one impulse, one thought, one question, sprang about and inboard.

Every man amongst us stared wildly and stupidly at his fellows. That was no time to particularize as to actions.

"Mutiny!" yelled the skipper, spasmodically bringing his Snider from the deck and making to put the butt to his shoulder. As he raised the weapon, however, a second report cracked on the still air. The rifle was knocked aside, he spinning half-around with it. A bullet, intended for his breast and all too well-aimed, had struck the barrel, glancing off to expend itself in the smooth waters of the ocean. At such times men see things rapidly—see everything within the radius of sight. We saw a musket-barrel poking out of the cabin skylight and behind it the face of one of the three bronzed, lithe-limbed scoundrels who had shipped with the more daring shark-fighter at Mangalore. The cabin-door—opening under the break of the poop and on to the main-deck—was almost closed, and in the narrow space left peeped a similar face and another rifle-barrel. Last of all, we saw the chief villain of them all making swift, silent strokes for the brig. Here ended our half-stupefied inaction.

"Stop dat coolie vrom poarding again! Shoot him, knife him, brain him—anyt'ing you can—but keep him off-poard!" shouted the skipper, then sent a bullet crashing at the face in the skylight.

The wounded mate groaned an even more eloquent desire to the same end. But there was no need for either request to be made. The big Irishman grabbed up a large loose block from the deck and sent it hurtling at the head of the swimming pirate. The missile struck its intended object; but, unfortunately, instead of striking his head and sending him insensible after his late enemy, it thudded on his shoulder. Human frog that he was, he promptly dived, the gleaming knife still in his right hand, instinctively prepared for any further

watery foes. Not to be outdone by this, Paddy as quickly seized a marline-spike and sprang to the side. Then he fell to the deck, giving vent to a howl of pain. An ill-directed bullet from the cabin-doorway had whizzed across my chest, ricocheted, and made a furrow in the calf of his leg. Momentarily I felt that the protecting hand of my mother was near me.

All this time there came the intermittent crack, crack, crack of rifles from the enemy's stronghold. Fortunately, however, for our party, the men were too new to the weapons to do more than chance-damage. Had it been otherwise with them, we should certainly have been picked off like flies. High above the firing we heard the skipper's shouted orders, the majority of which were strenuously and incontinently disregarded, for we were busy seeking places of refuge. At this awkward moment the young mate saved the situation. He had found that his wound was only a flesh one in the muscle of his left arm, and bound it up with his torn shirt, as Paddy was now doing with his hurt.

Seizing a handy marline-spike, the mate swung himself off the corner of the poop and on to the rail, then noiselessly to the deck. There, with his gaze fastened on the musket-barrel poking out of that slit in the cabin-doorway, he crept along, almost flat, to the bulkhead. The instant he was within striking distance, he crashed the thick end of the spike down inside the door-jamb, at the full length of his arm, his side actually touching the barrel of the Snider at that moment. It was chance-work, but gloriously successful. That blow had knocked a hole in the top of the native's head, and in a second the mate had jerked out the Snider, drawn the door to, and barred it on our side by putting the musket-barrel through the big brass ring and crossing it outside the jambs.

Not knowing how he could give additional help, and

incidentally thinking that another bullet from the skylight might prove unhealthy to himself, the skipper had leapt amidships. There, with a high meat-safe at his back, forming a barrier between him and the skylight, he turned his attention to other things, the foremost of which was the shark-fighter. The latter, having come to the surface after Paddy's effort to brain him, was making a detour—so the skipper afterwards told us—to get in under the stern, over which he probably thought he could climb unperceived, and thus get to the help of his confederates—not that we then looked on them as acting in concert. To us the whole affair was inexplicable, beyond a fugitive notion that the mutineers had seized an opportune moment. On the shark-fighter the skipper suddenly opened fire, seemingly to good effect, for the swimmer disappeared. We thought that the fellow had been shot and gone down. Matters afterwards proved that he had merely dived, unhurt by the shot.

Scarcely had the mate secured the door when he shouted for help and something to make the fastening more certain. Within a minute we were all there, except the skipper. An iron bar, previously used by the cook as a poker, took the place of the Snider; to this was added the additional security of a piece of light chain passed through the ring, hauled taut, and made fast to a rail opposite. Whilst this had been in progress the pirates had not proved idle, for bullets thudded into the other side of the solid, three-inch-thick oak obstacle. The captain, now at the mate's instigation, kept the skylight covered with his Snider.

The mutineers were now as so many rats in a trap. Yet what were we to do with them? They had all our stores, the skipper's charts, etc.; and even with a fine, fair wind we could not make port under several days. Still, there was something to be done—the wounded

required attention, and got what could be given in that way. Whilst this was being done we heard two shots from the poop, and soon afterwards learnt that they were fired at another head in the skylight and at the shark-fighter. During the interval the latter had, by aid of the rudder-chains and Heaven only knows what agility, climbed up to the stern rail, over which our vigilant skipper had seen his ferocious head appearing, the formidable knife between his teeth. The shot, however, sad to relate, had failed to make the desired impression, and the pirate deemed discretion the better part of valour by returning (we could only suppose) to the shoulder of the rudder and its accommodating chains.

Now came a general and fairly exhaustive reconnoitre of our position, the only new important result being the disconcerting discovery that we had but four more cartridges left for the Snider, the skipper having casually dropped a handful into his jacket-pocket when bringing the weapon on deck. Two men were told off to keep a sharp look-out over the brig's sides, by the break of the poop, lest the pirate under the stern should vacate his hiding-place and try the hazard of a swim forward. Then followed a low-toned, hurried discussion of ways and means, the outcome of which was a decision to venture a *coup de main* on the skylight. This consisted of tearing out the front of the teak-wood hen-coop—the birds being given a temporary roosting-place in the fo'c'sle—and making it into a kind of box large enough to fit over the skylight. To get it there and into position then became the one engrossing topic. Every man had a method of his own, and for a time superiority of rating mattered but little. However, after the mate had lumped the advice together and selected its most promising ingredients, the coop was made portable by attaching to the back of it three enormous cleats, by means of which three men could move the thing along in front

of them. But how were we to get it on to the poop? By dint of repeated effort in the use of main running-gear our improvised trap-hatch was hoisted up, caused to swing fore and aft, and then dropped—at the risk of breaking it—on the poop-deck. Thence three volunteers half pushed, half carried it before them to its intended place. It received two bullets on its way, the skipper sending one crashing into the skylight by way of return, his shot being followed by a howl of pain from inside. As the skipper said, when the thing had been securely lashed in place, it fitted beautifully, “like a shoreman’s Sunday go-to-meeting claw-hammer coat.”

The next two things to be done were the effectual barricading of the cabin-door and a careful search for the prime cause of all our trouble—the shark-fighter. The latter was undertaken by the captain himself, and consisted of an extremely stealthy creep along the port side of the poop and round the stern, the Snider ready in his hand; but the searched-for one was no longer in evidence. The two men who had kept watch over the brig’s sides were certain that he had not passed from under her stern. We began to surmise that the fellow’s strength had given out and that he had tumbled into the sea and been drowned. Then the supple-limbed cook-steward (probably remembering some of his own monkeyish tricks) suggested that he for whom we so anxiously sought might have entered the cabin by the stern-window—the brig, owing to her antiquity, possessing that evidence of other days. At this we collectively gasped. If the pirate should be in with his confederates, as we now began to think them, we should have to “look sharp and act ditto.” And if one man had gone in, what was to prevent all four of them coming out under the cover of darkness, fully armed, and shooting us down like so many dogs?

Again the mate saved us, this time even more effectually. Without a word to the skipper, he said in his

heartly fashion, "Come along, boys, I guess we'll square the yards of these black scoundrels!" There and then he ran forward, with us at his heels. He quickly made his intention plain. A large bundle of sacks, mats, and old rope was secured as a parcel in canvas and firmly fastened to the middle of two pieces of stout line. This was borne aft and hauled, as an outspreading and thoroughly effective bung, into the cabin stern-window, the four ends of the two lines attached to it being used as lanyards to hold it in its place, two stretched along the port side and two along the starboard.

The officer whispered something to the skipper, then turned to us again. "Now, boys," he said, "come along; one more trump-card just and this game will be ours." Gladly we followed him, feeling that we had here a commander worthy of our service. His purpose on this occasion was not so rapidly made evident, and he was not the kind of man to sap one's interest by letting the cat out of the bag too soon. After procuring two large augers from the carpenter's chest, together with some oil and lights, we descended into the main-hold, where, under his direction, we worked our way aft over the cargo. When we were under the cabin he stopped, and there set two of us to work boring holes through the deck above—holes which would have their upper openings in unobserved parts of the cabin-floor. He strictly enjoined a liberal use of oil on the augers, and having seen the men well started he left us.

We began to think that we had been neatly let in for the most dangerous part of the work, when the officer returned. The next five minutes laid bare his intention, which was, as he said, to "sulphurize" the blacks in the trap above. With him he had brought all the necessary materials for this purpose—iron pots, sulphur, charcoal, trays on which to stand the pots, and (conclusive proofs of his inventiveness and resource) two large tin funnels to fit over the fires and conduct the deadly fumes into

the cabin—all having come from the paint-locker and the carpenter's shop. Matters were quickly arranged, the fires lighted, and we scuttled on deck, replacing the main-hatch and its tarpaulin after our exit. Now there was nothing to do but to await results, the most alert watcher of all being the skipper, who stood on the port quarter with his Snider trained on the improvised bung in the stern-window.

How those minutes did drag! What a pain expectancy became! It seemed as if each second was a slender thread weighted at its end by eternity—to us, an eternity of dread, dread of we knew not what. There was no more shooting, and we could not understand the silence. I believe we would rather have had the pirates break out and get amongst us with their knives and Sniders than have had that awful strain continued indefinitely. We grew hungry without knowing that we were so, until the mate made us acquainted with the fact by appearing from the galley munching a biscuit and some cold salt beef. A few seconds later we were all busily stuffing ourselves with whatever odd scraps of eatables the galley could produce. Ten minutes afterwards there was not a mouthful of edible food outside the cabin occupied by the mutineers.

At last there came signs that the enemy within was awaking to the fact that a disturbing element was penetrating into their midst. These signs consisted of batterings—most probably with the butt of a musket, that, fortunately, being the best implement they had for such a purpose—on the cabin-door, then under the hen-coop, the only two places, besides the stern-window, at which they could effect an exit. Other signs were made up of shouts, and some shots at the timbered barriers to their egress. We began to fear that they would discover where and how our subtle friend was getting in to them, and stop up the holes. To set doubts at rest on this point it was necessary for some one to go down into the

hold and ascertain. Owing to the fumes, which we could not prevent escaping from the primitive fire-ranges, this was, if not a dangerous, at least a very unpleasant duty. Yet the lively genius of our mode of attack tied a wet sock about his mouth and nostrils and essayed the task himself, asking for no volunteer. When he returned it was with the happy report that the operations below were still going on and doing well. We then busied ourselves in examining the outside of the cabin to see if any fumes were escaping. After some quiet attention to the sides of the cabin-door we effectually closed up all the outlets save one—a small opening under the stern-window, at which we could not get.

The afternoon was now wearing on apace. We began to wonder if the night would close in on us before a change occurred in our conditions. Naturally, speculations were rife as to how long it would take the sulphur-fires to fill the cabin with vapour. Each man brought to bear some recollections of fumigations, consequent on quarantine. The brief tropic twilight came down and cut these short by necessitating a closer vigilance. Then night gathered round us, and an anchor-light was hung over the stern in such manner as to show if anything happened to the immense plug in the stern-window. About an hour after this the expected occurred. The bundle of sacks and ropes, etc., was seen to be agitated. Some one was hacking at it on the inside. The captain, his nerves evidently drawn to high-tension-mark, levelled his Snider carefully at the bundle. Presently it fell away, and out of the aperture came the shark-fighter, about his mouth a white cloth—probably saturated with water obtained in the cabin. The light from the globular lamp shone on his evil face, making it appear like that of an enraged fiend. As a wild cat after prey he snatched at the rudder chains and got a grip of them with one hand; in the other we saw the

knife with which he had slain the shark. This was the critical moment for the skipper, who knew it and discharged one of his remaining cartridges. He missed, but the climber, most likely startled by the shot, almost lost his hold and dropped the knife in a wild effort to keep himself from falling. Not an instant later, and over the taffrail he bounded, mad desperation marking his face and movements. Without a moment's pause he tore along the poop, leapt down to the main-deck, and rushed forward—at his heels every one of us, each man with some kind of weapon, the skipper fumbling his last charge into the Snider, and Shells endeavouring to brain the villain with a hand-spike. Without any further opposition he mounted the fo'c'sle, literally ran out along the bowsprit and plunged into the sea. We never saw him again.

Throughout that night we waited, hungry, wishing with all our might for dawn. When it came care was expended in opening the cabin-door, the skipper standing by with his one remaining cartridge for any pirate who chanced to have fight left in him; but it was not needed. We found the three stretched helpless, and forthwith dragged them out to the open deck, there to find two of them dead. From the other, who slowly revived, and was ironed before he had strength enough to do any harm, we learnt that they had been in touch all through with the shark-fighter, and that the latter's mad battle in the water had been a preconcerted affair, done to draw away our attention whilst the other three took possession of the cabin and the Sniders. The breeze which sprang up on that day soon cleared the sulphur fumes from the cabin and once more made it habitable. On that day, also, the two dead pirates were sent, sans any touch of ceremony and with no waste of canvas shrouds or sinking material, to the companions of that eighteen-footer which the ringleader had evidently done to death.

CHAPTER VI

In Calcutta—Mr. S—— again—Bound north—Venice and disillusion—Marseilles—The Devil's ante-room—Slipping Shells—Back to the ante-room—A dangerous study—Trick for trick—Undesired attentions—An insulted siren—A young interferer—Bout one—Under a mob—At bay—A big opponent—Sinister mischief—Shells to the rescue—My friend in hospital.

OUR passage up to the Tanjore port was of no special interest. The wounds in the mate's arm and Paddy's leg were kept clean and soon began to heal; but the Irishman had to lie-up till we were almost ready to leave Negapatam. So far as we could ascertain our prisoner was the fellow who first fired from the skylight, the evidence being the fact that his face was cut in all directions by splintered glass; otherwise he was unhurt. The last we heard of him was his deportation to the Andaman Islands, but for how long a term I do not remember. From Negapatam we sailed for Calcutta. Some nine days ere we reached the mouth of the Hoogli our "old man" fell sick. He died on the day we entered the river, and, a tug-boat being handy, we were able to keep his body till the brig was moored off Prince's Ghaut. There an agent took the craft into his charge, paid-off all hands except the mate, and the cook to attend to his needs, and laid her up, pending a settlement of the dead skipper's affairs. Shells was for standing by the brig, under the impression that she would be away again in two or three weeks' time, or of our joining the first possible coasting craft. To this I agreed, providing that the trip should be in the Burma or Malay direction—I was "out for experiences and didn't want to go twice

over the same ground." However, three weeks went by, and the *Mary Grace* showed no sign of putting to sea again; nor could we get the vessel we wanted—or rather that I wanted. Shells was willing to go anywhere, if we only remained in Asia.

Then the unexpected happened. Yet why should anything be unexpected in a life where nothing comes by rote?—that is the harbour-side of the lives of sea-going men. Briefly, at dinner one day Shells—who, as usual, had been about the shipping on the river while I had wasted the morning in looking for "experiences" in the city—said that he had met Mr. S—— (formerly of the *Algitha*). The latter was then mate of another "tramp," had put two men into the hospital, as the result of an accident, and would take us in their stead. Did I care to go?—Shells asked. Where to? Venice and Marseilles, then maybe—most likely up the Black Sea for grain. I jumped at the prospect—classic scenes! Go! I would go there and then, without dinner. Oh, where were my "Lempriere," my Brewer's "Phrase and Fable," my Rollin's "Ancient History" and half-a-dozen other books concerning the Mediterranean and its shores in classic times? All of which I had carried and read and re-read since Shells and I first left the Humber together, and had, alas! been cast adrift, flotsam for the hard rocks of ignorance and unappreciation, off Bombay. Truly, I had thrown away much for that coasting trip and the pirate "experience"! My old friend was still for remaining in the East. I thought that further explorations there could wait. This opportunity was a gift from the gods, and to throw their favours back at them might court a disaster like those of Midas, Abas and their kind. Of Calcutta, its glare, heat and iced-lemon-water; its nightly "sing-songs," Miadan and Black Hole; its corpse- and mollyhawk-infested river, and of its kaleidoscopic sameness I had seen enough. In a

way it was too respectable for me, too "civilized," was too much like Bombay, yet had no "experiences" to throw at me. So it was that we left "India's coral strand" for Europe.

The vessel coaled at Aden, where some twenty loin-clothed coal-heavers leaped out of a lighter because a piece of pork rind was thrown into their midst. While steaming along the Red Sea, we saw a sight that I shall never forget. This was a school of porpoises, at least a mile square and so thick in places as to check the vessel's speed. Where they were, it was porpoises rather than water. Dozens of them were struck by the propeller, so dense were they.

My only books on this passage were a Bible and an English dictionary, which I picked up in desperation when last hurrying aboard in Calcutta; and if a copy of Shakespeare were added to these books, I should say that no intending writer could better equip himself on the score of expression. But no sooner were we out of the Canal than I wanted no reading. From the hour of our entering the Ionian Sea I found a new interest in life. All my readings and picturings came back again; and, opening with an invocation to Clio, I began to form a verse-history and genealogy of the Greek gods and goddesses—good practice-work which was to be finished under darker skies and much sadder times.

Then we drew nearer to that bridal port of the sea, and I wrote in my "Journal": "Venice! What colour, glamour and romance; what tragedies, written and unwritten, has-beens and might-have-beens are conjured up by her name! A Mecca to the artist in colour and to whoever paints in words!" My Venice then was the Venice of the past, for which reason she stirred me to write—

Queen-mistress of fair seas, unsullied bride,
Recline I stately, grand, serene at rest—
As woman lovely—on my groom's soft breast;

Empress of many streams, whereon do glide
Such rare and sensuous pleasures as preside
At Intellect's own prow ; north, south, east, west
My argosies are flung, and bring the best
To deck my pageants, palaces and pride !

So t'ward my wealth, my beauty and my power,
My brain-force gathered from surrounding States,
The world casts envious looks, which gild my dower :
I have its loves—for what are mine ; it hates
Me that I Venice am—the whole world's flower
Of cities with the blue seas at my gates.

A thing of colour that beggars reproduction ; a past life that defies subsequent expression ; an atmosphere that is a will-o'-the-wisp to would-be entanglement. And does she not become to the artist that double-natured, bitter-sweet apple, when he awakes to what has made some men and marred others—the fact that the summit, and very often the better half, of every fine ideal, lies a wide world's width beyond the reach of adequate expression ? And Venice, as we see and know her in our minds, is an ideal, not a fact—probably never was a fact of that nature. What, then, shall be said of her when the charms of that siren of Nature, the sea, are added to her own ? Surely this is the superlative of a city's power over the better side of civilized man. But there are two Venices. Let me be true to the sequence of things. How well I recollect that first sailing into the Venice that is, clothed and englamoured in the Venice of my imaginings. No, it was not sailing ; that was a condition which would have added to the romance of our first meeting in actuality ; it was *steaming*. But neither the Thug of steam at the neck of romance nor the rusty "tramp" beneath me could mar her power or her fancied old-time beauty, as we neared her on that April morning. She was bathed in the rose-touched pearly hues of the rising sun, which sent his beams from over Trieste straight at that one-time glory of the maritime world, and turned the shimmering waters of the Adriatic to a lighter

blue. Then it was that I—running here and there, handling dirty ropes and the like, oiling coughing steam-winchs, preparing cargo-gear, etc.—saw the Venice of my mind. Happy, happy, indeed, are they who see her as she is without losing her as she comes down on the printed pages of past centuries! To them her lagoons of to-day, her craft and wharves, her squares, her Rialto and her atmosphere are those of the Middle Ages or even earlier, before the inset of that Byzantian element which to my mind very strongly leavened her Romanism. To them she is what she was; therefore they can have for her the feeling of the venerator, of the lover that can see no change in his changed mistress, the devotee who will not believe that his groundless faith is not the faith *par excellence*. To me, as we left her, with the sun setting over the Euganean Hills, she was like turning my back on the sun-glinted minarets of Constantinople, after hunting through its squalid streets for some glories, even if faded ones, of bygone Byzantium. To me she seemed so clearly to say—

Forlorn I sit amongst my changed lagoons—
 Stagnant, gone by, forgotten to the world,
 Decayed; my mistress-flag of commerce furred,
 I dream despondent 'neath recurring moons;
 Beggared, I droop, a slattern in the noons
 Of altered days; old, crabbed, my glories 'pearled
 On History's scroll; myself neglected, whirled
 By cosmic force to where my grandeur swoons!

E'en so shall you, proud cities of to-day;
 Where Memphis, Troy, Tyre, Carthage, Athens, Rome,
 Have crumbling gone Oblivion's dust-strewn way,
 I go; and you shall follow—flecks of foam
 On Time's vast sea, now seen, then gone for aye,
 To be but stars on Legend's misty doom.

To Marseilles I went with no strongly-preconceived ideas of the place; for this reason I experienced no disappointment, but my heart was like lead when I left there. It was not merely that I had done what could

not be undone ; but had done that which I should regret to the last day of my life. Of course, there was the attention-claiming mark of Monte Cristo's island ; as there had been Etna, Scylla and Charybdis, Stromboli and Sappho's leaping-place. From Venice till we were well out of the Straits of Messina, I lived in an imaginary world ; a world that was conjured up from the reading of old things ; a world that, now without a book, gave me libraries of emotion ; yet the whole of it did not bulk to one degree of what that Marseilles "experience" made me feel.

It was mid-week when we arrived. Whilst the vessel was being moored, Shells dropped an iron block on his toe. Thus it came about that I, accompanied by a pleasant and friendly Swede, went to post our letters at the Sailors' Home in the Rue de la Republique. From there—with every intention of presently obeying the injunction of Shells, to me, to "slip aboard again off the reel"—we walked up to the old harbour, there had a glass of wine, and went farther afield. But many a virtue is attained by the way of a short purse. On that occasion it might have been lack of money that caused our arriving on board in a state not to be ashamed of, and at a respectable hour. Yet what I had seen was as a savoury smell to the hungry whose digestion welcomes any food. So far Shells had, by the dint of one means or another, kept me from gaining any "experiences" in the real deeps of sailor-town life. But during that hour's roaming through those hellward streets we had halted for a drink in one devil's reception-room which was rather brighter than its fellows. Few were in it, and the various gambling contrivances were mostly at rest. Thus the three decoy sirens of the place were specially solicitous to keep us, and the attentions of two of them gave me some embarrassment. Though past "experiences" in less advanced surroundings had some-

what hardened me in these matters, I had never before been subjected to such an open fusillade. For the fairer one of the pair, I cared nothing; but the other, Sicilian that she evidently was—well, she appeared to be eminently suitable as a character in some gasconade; therefore I would study her.

“Money night” came, and Shells cut a hole in the toe of a shoe, so that I should not go ashore without him. But my thoughts were on the loose-lipped beauty, some four or five years my senior, away in that labyrinth of Hades to the left of the old harbour, and opposite to the old fortress in which I had twice to know confinement. Not that she appealed to, or in anywise influenced, me, beyond the mere power of loveliness on a temperament to which beauty was a kind of religion. I had seen our own rose-cheeked faces, had contemplated the black and comely, and was here acted upon by a most subtle blending of the two. I had the Open Sesame in my hand, was husbanding it for the purpose of long studying the Sicilian magnet, and my opportunity for quitting Shells arrived while in the vicinity of my desired goal.

Throughout the evening he had studiously kept from that downward quarter. Now I, seeming to know nothing of the direction we had taken, had lured him back from the Rue des Jardins to the right quay, as we went, of the harbour. Ashamed of his knowing that I had been to such a place and not told him; fearing that he would think the worst possible of it, were I to mention the place; instinctively knowing that he would utterly oppose my going if I asked his company, and pricked with shame at letting him know how I wished to go back there, I slipped quietly around the corner, darted up an alley, joined a parallel back-street and recognized my “bearings.” At the end of five minutes I had found that trap on the Avernus road. On my entering,

Calypso—as I had named her on my first visit—was serving *eau-de-vie* to two blue-bloused *matelots*.

“Ah!” said she, running up and playfully patting my cheek, an action of which I showed a studied lack of appreciation. “Ah, mine Inglice boy! What for you frown? You make plenty bad faces,—not goot, not goot!”

“It’s like you, then,” said I. “Bring me a bottle of wine,” and down went one of the remaining eight francs from the ten I had drawn.

“*Oui, mon bon*——”

“Speak English, the tongue of the world,” interrupted I, youthfully carrying my braggadocio a point too far. “Who in thunder taught you that jargon?”

She laughed, skipped off, flung me a look of piquant hell over her shoulder, and said, “What you have—sweet wine, or vin?”

“Sweet!” I called. “Do you think I want it sour?”

Her only answer to me was a mocking glance of the serpent at play, the while she lightly replied to a seeming shoreman who had, in French, remarked concerning me.

Here, seated at a toy of a table, I had a moment’s leisure for observation. Bar or counter there was none, the drink being served through a low hole in the wall. By it sat a wrinkled hag who saw the orders completed, put the money into a large leather bag in her lap, and was evidently too crippled to leave her seat without help. She it was who also regulated the sirens’ attentions to customers, seeing that none were too much favoured, to the unbusiness-like neglect of others. On the walls were some coloured prints of French soldiers, varied with pictures of prominent saints, and over the hole a conspicuous one of the Virgin—as though her picture would frighten the Devil out of the liquor which passed under it, and bless the money on which she seemed to be looking. The floor was of stone, sanded, reminding me

of grandmother's kitchen. Light was obtained from several cheap paraffin lamps fixed to the wall. The furniture was rude; the blind was red; the door let directly on to the street, and by its ever-gaping way one of the decoys—all of whom were merely barmaids—stationed herself from time to time to cajole in whoever she could from the numerous half-drunken sailors and such who reeled past to the mouthing of songs far more lusty than decorous. In my ignorance I had made the mistake of selecting a Saturday night for my investigation and study of character.

"Now," said Calypso, putting the wine on the table, and a tall, quaint glass, "you give me drink?"

"Yes, drink, yes," I replied; "drink it all if you wish to."

"Ah, no! you give plenty much."

"Do I?" was my query, filling my own glass. "Now, you can have it all." She smiled, hurried off for a glass and came back with one of the other sirens. This one also wanted to honour me in sharing the table. I gave her leave, and glanced round to see if number three would join the forces against my few francs; they evidently understood the virtue of a steady attack that disarms the suspicion of a rush—at least so I thought. The next minute, item three in the attractions ran, exclaiming, to the open door. I turned to see the cause, which was merely a reeling knot of sailors bawling out an English music-hall ditty. Back to the table at once came my attention, just in time to detect the other two emptying their glasses into a foot-square box which served as a spittoon. For a brief part of a second they were embarrassed,—their faces seemed to say—"Tiens, we did not agree for this."

Nimble wits work quickly on such occasions. I could have told them they were not ladies, and was about to express my crude insular opinion on their doing, when

I remembered being in the camp of the Philistines—and alone, but for two seeming Britishers then entering. I recollected one of my copy-book headings concerning discretion and valour, and gave it a new version in “One trick successfully carried out is worth two spoken opinions and a rough handling.” For this reason I, in a quiet, matter-of-fact fashion, and glancing from them to the toothless hag and others whose interest proved their having seen the action, said, “What’s wrong, Calypso?—wine nasty?” I then drank, put the glass down, made the ugliest grimace at my command, and added, “Ugh, the devil, it’s beastly!—sour as gall,—no wonder you threw away yours. Here, take it away and bring some fit to drink. I suppose something got into the bottle before it was corked and turned the wine bad.”

The sirens’ faces had previously been interesting, now they were enough to engross one’s attention; nor was one any more transfixed than the other. Plainly, they were too surprised to ask themselves questions; yet each one’s expression was a conflicting mass of queries. From me to the hag, and back, thence to the fairest one—who had offered a lost high bid for my favour in the prior visit—and to me again, they presently shot interrogative glances. All these were seemingly answered with the thought: “Your action has condemned the wine—or yourselves,—and you must change it—or allow yourselves to be thought guilty, and so give the house a bad odour in the nostrils of those present, and perhaps cause more active trouble to rise on the spot.” Others looked on in uncertain expectation. I sat still, outwardly looking on the matter with that utter indifference due from so promising a member of the world’s conquering race, inwardly buckling on my armour ready for surprises, thanking the natural modesty that had caused me to select a seat so near the door, and casting

about me to see how much damage I could do before bolting. All this passed in a minute; and, whilst the sirens still held their glasses toward the spittoon, the hag's querulous tones called out: "*Annette et Julia, venez, ici, coquines!*" and the various gambling operations were held in abeyance.

They ran across to her. A whispered consultation in French followed. Then my bottle of wine—as good as need be—was replaced by another, and all three of the decoys came to taste it with me. Peace with satisfaction—some would say honour. I had scored a win on their attempt to empty my pocket quickly by way of my own hand, but that preliminary victory proved a first march on the road to a crushing defeat. On removing the cork from the fresh bottle I filled my glass and slowly tasted the wine, whilst glancing from one to the other with all the knowing ignorance of my position—some of the gamblers watching me, others thinking the matter had lost its interest.

"M'm, yes—that's all right," said I, whereat Calypso tendered her glass. I told her to wipe it dry of the other wine, lest its dregs should sour this, then filled it up for her.

As she drank, the others pushed forward with, "You give me leetle, Johnny?—juust a leetle."

"Yes, of course I'll give you a leetle—I'd give a bone to any starving dog," and into each of their extended glasses I poured about a tablespoonful, then corked up the bottle, quietly placed it in the middle of the table, and began toying with the stem of my glass. At first they looked at me inquiringly—the while some elderly customers laughed, and flattered me on my foolish way by loudly declaring me "*un bon enfant*"—then they thought my action a joke, smiled, and pressed for more wine.

"No," said I; "you have what you asked for—a leetle;

drink it and go away." To all their importuning I replied with the same callousness, while endeavouring to engage Calypso in conversation. Thus were they, who had much less English than the Sicilian, forced to retire in disgust and ridicule. Then the laugh subsided, matters generally assumed their normal condition; so with my foot I dragged up a handy stool—chairs being few—for Calypso to sit on at the table.

She accepted the seat and emptied her glass; which I again filled, caring little how much *she* drank and determined to keep my wits about me. Here entered the Swede along with one whom I had seen at the Sailors' Home. My shipmate spoke to me, then they sat down at a neighbouring table.

For a while Calypso conversed—she answering my questions anent herself, her companions and the life they lived, with smiles of surprise and a yes or no as the case needed, and ever returning when business drew her away. Meantime, I wondered concerning Shells, and how I should thereafter face him on board. Presently the questions were varied by some pats on my cheek, to the accompaniment of, "*Ah, bel anglais, beau garçon.*" The patting was a liberty that I did not mind; but when she arose and dropped herself resolutely on my knee, I picked her up and returned her to the stool. Sufficient for my fancy was enough thereof. The lectures of Shells, a love of clean things generally, and a certain pride in acquaintances made me put a limit to her attentions. Not a British publican's daughter she, and I understood that—decoy only though she was in all likelihood.

Said she, her tone and manner evidencing resentment at the slight put on her ministrations, "What de matter?"

"Nothing."

"What for I no sit on your knee, den?"

"Stools are to sit on, knees to kneel with," I said quietly.

"What you say? . . . What you speak?"

"That you should sit down and drink your wine."

"No,—I no drink your wine!" she replied, pushing the glass away and rising. "I go some other man dat give me bottle."

"You can go to the Devil and get two," said I, warm indifference driving diplomacy to the winds, and once more unintentionally calling the gamblers' attentions to us.

"*Sacre!*—what you say?—You speak me deevil?"

"No," I carelessly rejoined. "How could I call you the Devil when you're alive? The Devil's dead—been dead a long time; or you would not be here. He died of despair at the world's reformation. Drink your wine, and don't be a fool."

But my pacificatory explanation was only as sweet foods to the dyspeptic. Either she had misunderstood my remark, or she would not understand its commentary.

"You Inglice tief!" she cried, with more frankness than attention to business.

Whereat a young compatriot crossed over and asked, "What he do, eh?"

"Annette, Annette!" shrieked the hag, while the other two decoys came nearer, followed by some of the customers.

"Do—do?—Him say me deevil, say me fool!"

"Annette, Annette, Annette!" came from by the liquor-hole. Then, feeling some safety in elbow-room, I backed, in seeming carelessness, out of the ring that was gathering around me. The young fellow who had first spoken incited her to retaliate after the fashion of her kind. This touched my dignity, so said I—

"Have you no business of your own, Johnny Crapaud, that you want to share in the affairs of others?"

Scarcely were the words out of my mouth when he sprang at me, and bounded back from my fist on to the table. The table went over under his weight, and he and it fetched heavily on the floor. The next instant, swish in my face came the wine from Calypso's glass. Very likely the glass would have followed; but on dashing the liquid out of my eyes, as I halted from a backward spring to get more room for action, I saw her hand detained in the firm grip of one who said—

“'Ere, fair do's—one dog one bone's English.”

Now I saw that I stood not alone, and gained strength of arm by way of a stouter heart. A flashing glance behind showed me that retreat was cut off by two burly wearers of blue blouses, who had partially closed the door and remained with their backs near it. From the one opponent I feared little. Although he had considerably more bulk, I felt myself his master by virtue of race and skill—and such a feeling is a fine ally in battle. That was before I learnt to use, and to put my trust in, half-a-dozen leaden pellets; when knives were the things I most feared at such times, so many tales had I heard that foreigners never fought with their fists. Here came my enemy again—beating the air like a windmill; this was why I found it so easy to guard his blows, and to plant one on his jaw with all the force of a well-set shoulder. Back he went, carrying one of the adventuring sirens with him. I began to feel myself in a new element—the humble Alexander of a new world. I could play with my foe, and up leapt blood and courage at the thought.

In the meantime, the hag cried out the names of her decoys; and Calypso told her, using much emphasis, to cease her noise, or the *gendarmes* would be in, and they made to suffer. A subdued hubbub ran through the crowd of some thirty men and youths. Amongst them I could see eyes fastened on me with looks varying from

a malignant glare to that of admiration, the least opposing being on the outer fringe of the ring. Opposite stood four Britishers, a small separate knot. In my rear was the door, and at the recollection of two of the enemy being in so unsafe a position for me, I edged to my right, that portion of the crowd moving as I moved—bringing the hag, her liquor-hole and the sacred picture to my front, the door on my left, a print of St. Peter looking down from the right, and behind me the flank wall of the room. This time the consumer of bread, grapes and mouth-racking wine was longer in coming to his feet. So I found space in which to gird myself well for his third attack. When he at length partially regained his feet—he made a feint by stumbling towards me—my legs and a throw being his certain object. Such had I seen before. Up came one knee, in the orthodox fashion of dealing with butters. I was a second too soon to open his “wine-tap.” The blow struck his brow, yet with a force that jerked him half-upright and sent him backwards withal. So much did this unsportsman-like trick of his incense me that I leapt forward and drove out my right fist to the very best of my strength. He saw me coming, threw down his head, and the blow glanced along his face and under his chest; the result being a loss of my balance, and a fall together.

That was apparently too tempting a position for the mob to resist. Down on me they came, so thick that their execution was mercifully marred by crowding. In the midst of the rush I felt my proper opponent’s hand at my throat. Now the devil within me roused himself to full activity. In the matter of sheer strength I could, by comparison, have pulled the Frenchman in halves. One fierce wrench tore away his hand. As the blows rained on me behind, and his nails left scores in my neck, my right fist crashed on his face to the utmost of the small compass I had. . . . My hands were encircling

his throat. With a hellish grip and effort I lifted him up, spun round and round with him in the faces of the crowd, using him as a buffer with which to increase the size of the new ring; then flung him, choking and limp, at the now dishevelled and glittering-eyed Calypso, whom circumstances had left the nearest to me.

A very hell-hound at bay, there I stood—smarting under the bruises on my body, foaming at the lips, blood running from the scratches in my neck, panting, my fists clenched and me almost fit for murder. Three of the Britishers gave me cheering remarks, wherein I incidentally noticed Cockney tones blended with north country twang. They had dragged off some of the mob, as I struggled to my feet. The natives stood off, eyeing me as some new kind of explosive. It was well for me, probably, that not one of them happened to have a knife. The pause held on. A few of them began to murmur something about "*le diable*," and it seemed as if the fracas was over.

Suddenly the old beldame recommenced her shrill cries. At that moment one of the big fellows by the door growled "Silence!" to her, then he rushed at me. Here I felt my victory to be over. His bulk and strength reduced my powers at a glance. But I must meet him, or go down like the lamb I was not; so that old tactic of a forward sideways lurch in a stooping position landed my shoulders with such force against the lower part of his middle that he doubled over me, his arms flying wide, so abrupt had been my action. Up I rose, his legs sliding off my back, and his face making a bloody impression on the sanded stone-floor. Clear of him I leapt, just in time to avoid a blow from his follower, on whose jaw I desperately fetched home. Then in came the mob again, and down I went, as I heard some one shouting, "Jonty arms! —jonty arms!" at the doorway.

What occurred in the next few moments I never knew,

beyond a deluge of blows—mostly on my body and once more hampered by crushing, as fortune had it. Then into the midst of the *mêlée* came a new force, flinging aside my antagonists as some men might do with so many dummies—I afterwards learnt—yet striking none. Up I was lifted by my collar, sick with pain of body, nigh fainting, and much of my face's natural covering amongst that cruel sand. Hardly was I on my feet when I heard an ominous thud. The hand relaxed its hold from the back of my neck; a body fell; I turned and saw Shells lying still on the floor. One of the big brutes had felled him with the seat of a heavy stool; and there the coward stood, the implement in his hand, as the *gendarmes* entered in response to that call.

That was the first time in my life when I really craved the power to take a life, when I would not have hesitated to kill on the instant, and was nigh crazed at my own impotence.

Reader, let us ring down the curtain on that most regrettable scene. Poor Old Shells! He had been seeking me when he heard the shout for the police. The rest requires no telling. During the next thirty-six hours some of the others and I (remembering my grandmother's "So will thou") drank the bitters of that military prison on the old fortified hill of Saint-Jean, which overlooks the entrance to the old harbour of Marseilles. On the Monday we were examined, then returned to our ships. My best of friends was in the hospital, and the most I could do was to go up there each evening and take him fruit—feeling all the time how intensely I would rather have met the big Frenchman, if only with a single-stick!

CHAPTER VII

A sad parting—The Bosphorus at sunrise—A significant dream—
The death of Shells—In England again—A suspicious offer—
Seditious literature—To St. Petersburg—Mistake No. 1—In
the eagle's claws—Free—A stumbling search—An unexpected
pandemonium—Timely interference—In a strange house—Mistake
No. 2—"The police!"—A hurried exit—Dropping our burdens—
Back on board.

IN the middle of that week our vessel was ready to proceed in ballast to the Danube, for grain and home. On the night before she sailed I told Shells that I should "jump" her; but he said, "No, you go with her; I'll get well, an' be in England before you, an' wait." To all appearances he was but saying the truth, while my desire was due to a hatred of leaving him behind. Still it had to be done; his head was mending rapidly; so, with a grip and a look which I cannot forget, and without a hint of the blame which sat so heavily and painfully in my heart, we parted company—never to meet again in this life. Yet I would not be premature. Joy may be forestalled; but grief should wait till its turn comes.

So, in obedience to Shells, I took my "February face" to sea again; with no companions now except that old lexicon and the Bible, and not wanting them. In glorious Mediterranean weather the "tramp" thrust her rusty nose again through classic scenes; but even these had lost the salt of their flavour, till we entered the Archipelago, in such a night as Dido stood "and waved her love to come again to Carthage." It was our first watch—the mate's, that is; and when I went to the

wheel at ten o'clock, Mr. S—— passed some pleasant remarks on the books I had aboard the *Algitha*, my reading generally, the *locale* we were steaming through, and kindred matters, as he paced from side to side on the bridge, immediately before the wheel. He also spoke of Shells—telling me to cheer up, not go about as I had done, and that my chum would be with us on the following voyage, probably as bo'sun again. Hence I did find occasion to be less miserable; but at times there was in my subconsciousness a something that could not be dispelled. So we passed up the Dardanelles—to me the Hellespont—and for a while I was full of matters Trojan, Hero and Leander, Byron's swim, and the like. It was an ideal morning, about an hour after sunrise when we rounded Seraglio Point, and the glory of the Bosphorus, with the false splendour of the city of the Golden Horn, burst upon me. To me then the dogs and the squalid streets were merely picturesque got of reading, and no first-hand knowledge. Therefore the pearly-greys tinged with pink; the warmer-growing opal hues and the faint mists of the hour; that winding blue highway of craft, with its wooded and palace-dotted slopes, from one to the other of which poor, gadfly-tormented Io swam, to be afterwards as great as her persecutor; those gilded crescents, topping slender minarets and gleaming in the sunlight, cupolas, roofs rising above roofs and mixed with the greens of Nature, all blended with historic and legendary associations—these were to me what they appeared to be, the outer expression of greater inward magnificence and interest too deep to be readily sapped. Of a surety I should be compelled to have a spell in Constantinople.

We remained there an hour, awaiting a change of pilots, or something of that. My sadness somewhat returned as we steamed eastwards again. Shells had said, "I'll get a letter written, lad, to meet you at Con-

stant'; the missionary that comes up from the Sailors' Home 'll do it." This had not come, and I argued ill from that fact. Then, between the mouths of the Bosphorus and the Danube, I dreamt that he and I had seen each other from two vessels which met at sea, and that we waved farewell to one another as the ships parted. From the one-bell call, when I awoke with this dream on my mind, I knew that I should never see my friend again. I had learnt the value of some of these metaphoric dreams of mine, particularly when the allegory happened to be a plain and simple one. With a heart like lead, yet full of pain, I went to the wheel, and presently told Mr. S—— that Shells was dead. He pulled up suddenly in front of me, saying—

"How do you know? What do you mean?"

I told him my dream, and what appeared to me to be its open though allegorical interpretation. He kindly tried to laugh it all away, but in vain. At Galatz I had no wish to go ashore. On the day after our arrival the mate came to me and said that my dream was a true one—the consul's clerk had sent word to our "old man" that pneumonia and complications had set in with the man we had left behind, and that he had been buried on the day before the letter was written. So far as Mr. S—— and I could ascertain, my dream must have occurred an hour or two before Shells died. What was written in my "Journal" on that occasion was burnt long ago. Enough, it was a formless epic-elegy, mingled self-accusation, bitter grief, and railing against inevitability, too long and too unconsidered in its outburst to be repeated here, even if I could remember it all. Not only had his death been indirectly due to my going into the sort of place out of which he had always striven to keep me, but, curiously enough, my "experiences" came mostly when he was near, except when I really "looked for trouble." Caring nothing whether chance

took me home or to perdition, we passed again through that Nature-slit between Europe and Asia; but now, like the charm of early life vanishing from the virtuous mind that has suddenly stumbled into great evil, there was neither sunshine nor romance in it for me. So it was all the way westwards and north to Millwall Dock, whence I at once repaired to Grimsby, bitterly desperate in a sense, and immediately made an application to join the Canadian North-West Mounted Police. The reply that came was "Recruiting suspended for the present."

Having satisfied the R.N.R. requirements—which service would merely lapse if I ceased to go to sea—and failed to get into the Scots Greys on the score of my not being tall enough, I made for Sunderland. There I found two former shipmates, brothers they were and Norwegians, although they went, colloquially, under the nicknames of Barney and Mike. Their proper names were Olaf and Ivor. Fine chums and staunch in trouble, they were thick-set, young, strong as bullocks, generally cool as water-melons, but devils of persistence when aroused. We shipped together in a Baltic "tramp," and formed one watch. On the night before the steamer left with coal for St. Petersburg, we three went ashore to buy matches, soap, and some other things for the voyage. In the course of our shopping we became separated, and I returned on board alone. It was late ere they followed me. Then, while we were preparing to turn in—the other A.B.'s being at their lodgings ashore—they told me of a "funny-looking man" who had accosted them some little distance outside the dock-gates. His conversation had shown that he knew them to be a part of the *Volante's* crew. How he had acquired this information was of no consequence. What interested us was his offer of a sovereign apiece, to them, to carry a parcel to the Russian capital. Without declining the offer, they had put off accepting it until the following

day, on the excuse of being in a hurry; in reality to ask my advice on the matter. They were simple fellows; I had "book-learning"—a dangerous qualification for an adviser in affairs of life—and was generally referred to when the subject lay outside of our own narrow lives. As we talked, smoked, and made ready for our bunks, a black figure quietly entered the fo'c'sle alleyway and advanced into the dim light of our sixpenny paraffin lamp. An eye-signal and a gesture from Olaf told me that the strange individual whom they had mentioned stood before us. Tall and thin, his pale, un-English face overtopping a shabby frock-coat, a bowler hat half-covering his rather long hair, and a pair of thin white hands dangling at his sides, he looked more like a dock-side missionary than anything else. But instantly my mind flew to Anarchism, Nihilism, and all the other revolutionary "isms."

The man gave me a quick, searching glance, spoke a collective "Good-evening" in a gentle tone with a foreign accent, then turned to Olaf and asked if they had decided to accept his offer. For some seconds there was an awkward feeling in the air; but an admission on Ivor's part, that the matter had been referred to me, caused the stranger to turn my way at once, and soon we were all closely discussing the subject. The parcel was to be delivered at a stated address in St. Petersburg, and help would be given to get there from the quay. I asked its contents, and was assured that it consisted solely of printed matter. I then said that before taking a hand in the affair I should want to see every scrap of what the parcel contained. Infernal machines, bombs, and the like were in my mind. I knew something of the "Friends of Russian Freedom Society," and had not been in Russian ports for nothing. Still heedless where I went or what I did within certain limits, to smuggle "liberty literature" into the country I was by no means

averse; but uncertain explosives, meant for a fiendish purpose, were quite another matter. However, a sovereign was offered me to join the project. We were to see the whole contents of the package before leaving Tyne Dock; and the work was agreed to. The man fetched his parcel—not a big one; we examined it; and at 1.30 p.m. next day the *Volante* was *en route* for the Russian capital.

After passing Copenhagen we tackled the difficult subject of where to stow the pamphlets and leaflets whilst the Russian revenue officers were making their usual search. At the outset we had decided that the undertaking was to be kept a profound secret between ourselves, lest some unfriendly shipmate should get us into trouble. Thoughts of horrible Russian prisons and Siberia made us feel a touch of the importance of what we were doing, especially as Olaf and I had tasted the rigours of a French military prison. At the same time we had fully assured ourselves that even if we were caught with this strange *contrabando*, we could get out of the affair on the score of innocence and by the help of the British authorities. Finally, our beds were fixed upon as the best repositories of the dangerous parcel. Luckily, as we formed one watch, we were left alone in the fo'c'sle during our watches below. So to the work we set, ripped open the seams of our "donkeys' breakfasts" (as seamen term their mattresses), placed the literature between the straw, and sewed up the seams again. By this means the Russian preventive men were cheated when we reached our destination. So far we had looked on the affair more as a fine, great joke than anything else, for which a sovereign each would be ample pay.

Next came the more dangerous and delicate task of conveying our consignment ashore, for the reward was not to be paid us until it had been deposited at a given

address. We arrived on a Friday morning, as expected. The landing of the literature was to be effected on the following Sunday evening, and the house, where it was to be taken, reached under specific directions given us by our employer.

When our fellow A.B.'s had gone ashore after tea on the Sunday we fastened the fo'c'sle door, undressed, opened our beds once more, tied the literature—printed, fortunately, on very thin paper—around our legs and bodies with rope-yarns, and then dressed again. Thus weighted, a scramble was made across an intervening vessel's deck, and the quay gained some two hundred yards above the Custom-house.

Now we were veritably in the eagle's claws. A wrong move and we should be—Heaven and an autocratic Government alone knew where. But, acting on the directions given us, we sauntered, in apparent carelessness, towards the Custom-house, in front of which was a row of droskies plying for hire. Here we were to find the promised help of a vehicle to take us to our destination. Keeping the roadway between them and us, and watching them out of the corners of my eyes, I made a certain sign taught us by the strange man in Shields. Not one of the drivers, however, made an answering sign. This put us into a quandary. We paused, apparently to look at a wheat barge; in reality to whisper our surprise and misgivings to each other. We repeated the sign without result, then went on and returned again, when Olaf made the sign. To our great joy a long-hatted driver made what we took to be the return signal. Over to him we walked, and were greeted with: "Drosky, Sjhonny—Nevska Prospect?" These were the passwords for which we had been told to listen.

Still more highly pleased, I replied with the other password: "*Nevska, dobra.*"

He nodded his head, opened the door of the vehicle,

and in we tumbled, feeling awkward in our thick padding of revolutionary literature. The next minute we were being driven away, behind a pair of shaggy, long-tailed animals with jingling bells on wooden arches over their shoulders. At present I had no thought of looking for the particular features of St. Petersburg. We watched the shipping and barges on one side, as the drosky rattled along, and the houses on the other side; wondering what kind of place we were being taken to, how we should come out of the affair, and what strange happenings we should experience before returning to the *Volante*. Ivor jokingly said that we had better stop and have a glass of vodka each, because when once we were in a Russian prison we should never again have a chance of tasting the national spirit. At this grim jest Olaf smiled, and I instinctively felt for the revolver I had foolishly dropped into my pocket when leaving the *Volante*.

At the nearer end of the great bridge our drosky pulled up with a jerk. The sound of an imperative voice drew our attention sharply to a uniformed man asking questions of the driver. This sent all sorts of wild ideas flashing through our minds. But in a minute we were off again, over the bridge. The man, a police-officer, had been merely taking the drosky's and driver's numbers, where he had picked up his passengers, and whither he was going. This information was always exacted of every drosky driver who crossed the bridge after nightfall.

Now we were in the city proper, the part left behind being but a suburb. Soon the long, straight Nevská Prospect stretched, seemingly endless, before us. Half-an-hour's safety was making us think as lightly as ever of the undertaking. The rest lay with the man on the box, and we began to think of the three pounds as sure and ourselves happily back aboard the *Volante*. Never

were surmises more premature or erroneous. Onward we were carried, and still onward, till it seemed to us, who had never before been more than a quarter of a mile down the street, that the principal thoroughfare of the Russian capital must stretch across the whole kingdom. Probably this was owing to a returning anxiety to be rid of the seditious matter about us.

Presently, however, our Jehu slackened the pace of his animals, half-turned on the box, and said something in Russian. Verbal and pantomimic attempts to understand each other followed. Then said he, "You go ship?" This baffled us more than ever. Considering the whole circumstances under which we came to be in his vehicle, we could make neither head nor tail of his meaning. At last, putting the question down to be something quite beyond our reasoning powers, we waved him onward, at the same time trying to make him understand that we wished to "get there quickly." At that he whipped up his horses again, but the look on his face as he turned back to them left us wondering. Five minutes later we three sat bolt upright as one man—a triangle of staring faces on which was written a silent query, weighty enough to fill us with consternation: *Had we got the wrong man?* Our three heads came together, and a hurried consultation ensued. We compared thoughts and opinions, then Ivor suddenly vented his favourite exclamation, "Tunder!"

"What's up?" I asked.

"Time," said he. "We was to make der sign at seven o'clock. We made it soon after six!"

It was true—only too true! In the hurry and excitement of secreting the prints about us and getting away with them, we had forgotten that important item of time. The drosky man was pulled up sharply, we alighted, and he came down to us. Further efforts were made to understand each other, during which we almost forgot

the nature of what we were trying to find out. There in the main street of St. Petersburg we were asking the man if he was with us in a plot against the Government of the country!—for all we knew to the contrary. Then Olaf spoke to him in Finnish, which he understood, and for some minutes they talked in that language. Meantime, Ivor and I stood by on tenterhooks, lest our comrade should, in getting the information we needed, give the man an inkling of that which we must keep secret.

At length Olaf turned to us with the assurance of his having divulged nothing of our purpose. Then he explained how the man had accidentally made something like the sign we had been instructed to look for. As for the “Drosky, Sjhonny—Nevska Prospect?” that was a common remark of his kind to foreign seamen. Right enough, and, alas! wrong enough, it was obvious that we had made a serious mistake! To bewail or further discuss this was useless. The busy part of the city was left far behind us. Where we had halted the Nevska Prospect was almost quiet as a village street. After a short discussion between ourselves we agreed that our best plan was to get rid of the drosky, then endeavour to find our destination on foot, as we were apparently in its neighbourhood.

With this end in view Olaf turned to ask the driver his fare; but that fare was never paid. As Olaf turned there was a patter of quick footsteps close by us, and we were at once hemmed into the drosky’s side by half-a-dozen long-coated, big-booted police. “Now we are in for the worst,” was the thought that flashed through our minds. Instinctively we pressed back to the vehicle, and would most likely have gone leaping over it in an endeavour to escape had not the officer-in-charge spoken to the driver in a way that curiously relieved our fears. Yet the lessening in our anxiety was only momentary. Not more than three remarks passed between them; then

the officer's sharp eyes swept us up and down. We so guiltily remembered our padding of seditious literature that a better light would probably have betrayed us. Me he passed over as unworthy of prolonged notice, but the Slavonic cast of my shipmates' faces cost them some unpleasant attention on his part. From them he turned to the driver with another question. Then we three were roughly pushed aside—for the Russian police never waste any gentleness—and the driver was marched off, his drosky also being taken. Us they left standing there like three rural simpletons, gaping after them in amazement and unable to believe our senses, until the party and the vehicle were away countrywards.

Then we turned to gaze at each other, which action was quickly interrupted by a sharp mutual turn in the direction of the city, and off we went at the fastest swinging pace our padding would permit. Even then it was hardly in our thoughts that we had been inside the Imperial eagle's cruel claws, to use a metaphor, and escaped untouched. What the driver had been arrested for—if arrested—was of no concern to us, our own affairs being too prominent and pressing to allow of any worry or even conjecture about another person. But presently we regained some of our lost self-possession, and began to cast about quietly for the street containing the house at which we were to deliver those prints. So far this was the most delicate part of the whole venture. The name of the street was in our pockets, printed in Russian. Of the house, our strange employer had given us such a minute and telling description that we could not forget it. He had likewise conveyed to us some idea as to how far down the Nevskia Prospect that special street was. With these particulars to guide us we commenced the search.

In the matter of lighting, especially in side thoroughfares, St. Petersburg was then far from being a model

city. To us the half-Asiatic, half-European buildings, the dress of the few people we met, and general *tout ensemble* of the place were anything but assistant factors. Ask a question as to locality of even the most disreputable creature in our way we dared not, lest he should prove to be a Government spy and cause our arrest. Thus we sought for the house—strangers in a strange land, hampered by semi-darkness, and the dampening expectation of rough hands and a rougher prison, and with the atmosphere of the thing changed greatly. Facing death at the masthead in a gale was child's play compared to this affair in the ill-lit side streets of the Muscovite capital. Nor did success, by the way, inspire hope of better things, nor that confidence in action needful for the final gaining of our goal. To enumerate the incidental accidents would make this account a long story.

After several times being at the point of giving it all up, we, believing ourselves at last in the right street, stood before the door of what we took to be the assigned depository of those seditious leaflets—which we would ere this have dropped in the thoroughfares behind us had we dared to, and if we could have decided to forego all chances of gaining the promised reward. The house—an exact description or location of which it would be unwise and unkind to give here—stood slightly back between two others, and three doors from a corner that was left without even the usual glimmering apology for a street lamp. We were in the middle of a whispered debate as to our plan of procedure, and who amongst us should be the unfortunate one to knock at the door, when around that unlighted corner came a small party of natives, whose soft-leather high-boots made so little noise on the earthen side-walk that they were in collision with us almost before we knew of their presence. To the best of my knowledge there were five of them, for we never learnt the exact number, so quickly did the

affair take place. The first indication of their coming was a hurried, mingling, sougling thud of feet. Then we were partially knocked aside; gruff voices used apparently strong words, accompanied by violent and impatient actions. Naturally, we thought the newcomers a posse of more than usually rough police come to arrest us. I felt the grazing of what at closer quarters would have been a heavy elbow-blow on my ribs, and half-turned to pay it back when between me and the strikers came Ivor, sent sideways by the lumbering shoulder-lurch of a bearded Russian. The next instant this one of the brawlers—for such they evidently were—was sent reeling our way by Olaf, who had received some lessons in English fisticuffs and had strength enough to make a bullock reel. About spun Ivor, calling to me in English to get out of the way, which injunction I, recollecting some of his former exploits at such times, quickly obeyed. Scarcely had I done so, by a ducking movement, when over my head whirled the lower part of that lurching Muscovite's anatomy. By bending sideways a little, putting his left arm to the fellow's right side, his right arm to the left side, Ivor had, owing to his enormous strength, taken the Russian in his arms, and was using him as a kind of battering-ram against his own companions. How those top-boots did swing about the other Russians' heads, whilst the wearer of them gurgled out exclamations which Ivor understood as little as he heeded! How the assaulted ones jumped, stumbled, and rolled out of the strong man's way, venting cries of pain and fear as their compatriot's boots struck them! It was as though a fury with a giant's strength had suddenly been let loose in their midst, and within the space of a few minutes all our assailants, save the captive, were fleeing like rats from a terrier.

In the meantime another change was taking place in the scene. After a flash of light from one of the win-

dows, the door of the house behind us was opened ; some one came out and began to pluck gently at my sleeve (I being nearest the house), saying, "Come, come." In the partial darkness I could see that this last-comer was dressed in native clothes ; but the English word, and our being at the place we had looked for, reassured me. I drew Olaf's attention from his brother to this new departure. We looked at the man, at the dark open doorway, answered "All right," and went to Ivor. At our news he put the battered victim on his feet, gave him a shove, said "Go"—and the other went.

Now, quietly laughing at the affair and at what seemed to be a happy end to our venture, we entered the house behind the man, who quickly closed and secured the door. We were led along a semi-dark passage, shown into a dimly-lighted room, motioned to sit down, and left there. For some minutes we talked of the affair outside ; then, ever inquisitive in new surroundings, I began to turn my attention to the room and its contents. It was a large apartment with a deep recess at the farther end. I had made the tour of its walls from about the middle of the opposite side, and was slowly penetrating this almost totally dark recess, when a voice at my side abruptly said, with a foreign accent, "Always learn what you can, but never forget the necessity of secrecy."

I started back, and past me brushed a tall man in a skull-cap and a dressing-gown that reached to his heels. Without saying more or giving me a glance, he advanced, with a shambling gait, to where Ivor and Olaf were sitting. I followed him. The stranger paused, looking at my companions in silence and at such undue length that we began to feel decidedly ill-at-ease. His manner and appearance impressed us in a strange way. By some occult means we felt that we were in the presence of an uncommon kind of man. At last he grunted rather than said—

"Humph! you are from England;" then turning to myself he added, "Come you with me," and resumed his shuffling walk towards the door by which we had entered the room.

"But cannot we finish this business here?" I asked, not liking to be separated from my companions. He made no answer nor looked back, and somehow, willy-nilly, I moved after him. When half-way to the door I turned to Olaf and Ivor and put two fingers to my lips, indicating that I would whistle should I need them. They nodded their comprehension of my meaning, and I followed my guide out of the room and along a continuation of the passage. When I was about to enter another apartment I saw Olaf's head protruding from the doorway we had left. He was watching where we went, and nodded again as I disappeared. This second room was well-lighted. A low log-fire burnt in the huge grate, before which the strange man halted, facing me, his back to the fire. I noted that his long face was peculiarly cadaverous. Altogether he reminded me of the alchemists and astrologers of whom I had read in old romances.

"You are an adventurous trio," he remarked. "Sit down." I did so as best I could, my padding considered. He added, "They have the strength, you the wits. How long have you been in partnership?"

"About six months altogether," said I.

"Humph! and how often in that time have you played fools together?"

"Probably more times than we have sovereigns," I replied carelessly, now feeling more at my ease in his presence.

"Humph! and that is why you undertook to bring me an explosive into a country where the possession of it by private persons means years in a vile prison?"

"We have brought no explosive into Russia," was my quiet answer.

"*What?*"

"I say we have brought no explosive into Russia."

He looked steadily at me for some seconds, then drew forth a paper from which he appeared to read: "Three sailors, two Scandinavians and a British subject with the brains of the party, will arrive on Friday, April 27th, and come to you on the following Sunday evening at about 8.30." The time was then a quarter to nine by a clock on the mantelpiece behind him. "Now," he concluded, again looking at me from under his shaggy brows, "will you deny that you three answer this information to the letter?"

"No, I will not," I rejoined.

"Then why do you not hand over the parcel, instead of wasting time?"

"I tell you once more that we have not brought any explosive substance or liquid into this country now or at any time," I reiterated, this time with some force.

"Do you know," he asked sternly, "that your presence here, especially after my servant rescuing you from that fracas at my door, greatly endangers both your safety and mine?"

I replied, "My wits are not asleep, and I know what country we are in. Let us get back to the subject—our errand."

"Give up the explosive," he angrily interrupted, "or I will——." He was moving towards a bell-pull about six feet away when I stopped both words and action by bringing my revolver quickly into sight and saying—

"Touch that bell-rope and I'll blow your brains out."

"What?" he cried.

I was about to repeat my threat when there came three heavy knocks on the street door, followed by a

loud, stern command in Russian. Instantly that strange man stood rigidly upright, fear making his unpleasant face appear repellent. Scarcely had the echoes of those knocks ceased to resound through the house, when in rushed the person who had come to us in the street. "The police!" said he in English, horror in his tones. He was visibly shaking.

Without a moment's further thought my fingers went to my mouth. I gently whistled the signal well known to Olaf and Ivor, who were in the room with us almost before I had finished. Altogether disregarding the cadaverous individual and his servants, I rattled off explanations. More imperative knocks fell on the front door, and we three made hastily for the back of the house. We found ourselves in an enclosure surrounded by a high wall. Back we scurried, got a chair and a stool, secured the door forming our exit, and returned to the wall. With the stool on the chair, Olaf on top of them, and Ivor steadying the whole, I—being considerably lighter than they were—climbed up Olaf's back and gained the summit of the wall. Beyond the barrier was darkness—pitchy darkness, uncertainty, but possible escape. I whispered this to them.

"Get up," was the sole reply.

A minute later we were all perched side-by-side on the wall—three unlucky black crows gazing doubtfully into a dark abyss. The improvised ladder had been kicked away to avoid a clue. Olaf and Ivor lay across the wall-top, with their heads on the side we wished to go. They each took one of my hands and lowered me gently down till I felt solid earth. An instant's survey of a couple of yards around where I stood, a reassuring "Come along!" and they were by my side. A while we listened anxiously after the thud occasioned by their drop from the wall. But for the rattling of some distant cart or drosky all was still as the grave.

We now began the delicate business of ascertaining into what kind of place mischance had made us venture. One great help in this came by our eyes becoming accustomed to the darkness. Yard-by-yard, we progressed in our reconnaissance, yet making all possible haste. At last we made sure of being in some sort of private grounds, divided from a street by another wall. Behind us we could see the house we had left, now with lights in all its formerly dark windows.

In the shadow of the second wall a halt was made, owing to Ivor whispering his intention to rid himself there and then of the incriminating prints. That idea was seized on at once by Olaf and myself. Quick as thought almost off came our outer clothes, the rope-yarns were cut, the prints dropped away from us, and again we stood dressed ready for action. We decided to find the most ill-lighted portion of the street without, then scale the wall and be off. At that moment Olaf announced his intention of having some satisfaction out of the affair by scattering the leaflets, so far as he could with safety, on our way back to the *Volante*. From this madcap freak we dissuaded him. About twenty minutes after scaling the second wall we were suddenly confronted at a crossing by the name of the street for which we had sought so diligently! Then came the dawning of truth—we had been in the wrong house! It was all the fault of those unconscionable Russian characters. It was too late to bemoan the mistake—the second of that eventful night. We arrived aboard safely at eleven o'clock. The "fine, great joke" was at an end; we were each a pound poorer than we had expected to be; but much more than three sovereigns would have been required to make us go through it all again.

CHAPTER VIII

The midnight sun—Carrying the Faithful—Flung overboard—Another mad-brained venture—Constantinople again—An English “Turk” —Feigning illness—The ruse successful—Beginning the “grand tour”—Some Howling Dervishes—*En route* for trouble—I fall into a mosque—A roof-fight—One too many—A run for liberty—Sudden disappearance—The price of curiosity.

ON the evening after our mad escapade off Nevskia Prospect, I was about to give the matter full details in my “Journal” when Olaf asked if that affair was the subject of my writing. He knew that I kept an extended sort of diary. I said yes. He pointed out how foolish this would prove to be if any trouble arose out of what we had done. Such logic required no driving home; hence the record was left to be written on the neutral waters of the Baltic. Whilst our vessel remained on the Neva we carefully watched any stranger whom we saw loitering on the quay-side. We also stayed aboard, except when it became necessary for one of us to do some shopping—the steamer being a “weekly” one, that is wages were paid weekly, and each man provided his own food and cooked it on the galley stove at his own convenience. On these occasions we went singly, in working-clothes and unwashed, for obvious reasons, to shops along the street by the quay. As to the curious individual in the dressing-gown and skull-cap, look at him and the affair as we might, we could not see other than that his talk of an explosive was meant either as a sort of test-opening to the real matter, a metaphoric reference to the possibly explosive nature of what we carried about us, or as a mixture of both. Nothing

could convince us now that we were in the wrong house; according to the description given to us we found this to be impossible, in spite of the confusion in street names. With regard to the police coming there at that moment, and what afterwards transpired, we knew nothing. Of course we had theories of this, that and the other; but nothing occurred anywhere within our knowledge to prove or disprove one of them. So there the matter had to lie—a puzzle, a muddle and a warning. And the farther we got away from it, the worse it seemed to become.

Thus when the “tramp” discharged her deals and grain in Hartlepool, and was going to the Tyne to load for Cronstadt, with the possibility of continuing on to St. Petersburg to pick up a return-load, we unanimously agreed that “he who fought and ran away lived to fight another day.” We were all three ready enough for an escapade at any time, too ready on occasions, hence came some for the recording of which there is no room in this narrative. But our individual and aggregate pennies of observation led us to the conclusion that we had come luckily out of a hair-brained piece of business, and that to fling further challenges at so formidable an opponent as the Russian authorities would be to proclaim us more fit for an asylum than a ship’s deck. So we left, shipped for a run to Archangel and back, had a very pleasant trip, saw the sun at midnight—previous to this I had sat on the open deck reading ordinary print near the same hour up the Gulf of Bothnia—and returned to the Tyne. There we joined a steamer that was going out, on a time-charter, to carry pilgrims to Mecca and Medina; and I, of course, took my usual half-chest of literature. First we picked up a nondescript crowd along the southern shores of the Mediterranean; then, after taking them back to their several ports of departure, we went out east, as far as Singapore, for a load of the most

ragged, picturesque, heterogeneous humanity that ever crowded a vessel's decks, above and below. In colour they ranged from Mongolian saffron to the blackest that India could produce; in social status from the well-to-do merchant's family who carried their own cook to the members of the lowest caste who had probably been saving their pence for ten years in order to make the pilgrimage; and in morality, so far as circumstances allowed us to judge, from uncalendared saints to cut-throats. The humours, the accidents and the threatened tragedies of those two trips would fill a third of this book. But enough for the matter are the points thereof, and these must suffice here: When we were crossing the Indian Ocean, bound west, I was flung from the end of a trisail-gaff and picked up, none the worse for some fifteen minutes' dip in the cooling water—except for the knowledge that a shark might come along at any moment, as one did before the rescuing boat was again alongside the steamer. Then I had once more the sensation of feeling the nearness of that spirit-hand, which always and only came immediately after an escape from a sudden entry to the great secret, and I knew that for a fourth time circumstances had cheated death for me. To all appearances a pilgrim, who had a grudge against me—apparently one of foolish jealousy—had let go the gaff-vang, causing the spar to swing out and jerk me off; this could not be proved properly, so there the matter ended. The other affair was as mad-brained a venture as even the St. Petersburg muddle. It consisted of an attempt, as three dumb pilgrims—because neither of us could speak an Eastern language, though we could all use strong remarks in some Asiatic tongue—to reach Mecca! The steamer was lying off Jiddah, undergoing a very needful internal cleansing, ready for the return of the pilgrims. On a Saturday evening we went ashore to begin the expedition; treating it rather as a big joke,

in which we *might* get a rough mauling, than as a dangerous business; and thinking that if we got through all right, the "old man" would do no more than log us for absence from work. We understood that there were about eighty miles to cover, there and back; counted on our being there on Monday morning—each man carrying all his rations—taking a quick, quiet look around for a couple of hours, and being aboard again on the Wednesday. Physically, it would not be an easy piece of work; but we were young, strong as donkeys and nearly as silly and stubborn. Perhaps it was due to these two characteristics that the affair became an ignominious fiasco.

However, Clotho was spinning me some better things on the thread of my fate. When the last of the faithful had left us finally, and we had washed and fumigated away all evidences of their presence, our vessel loaded up for Leghorn. From that port we, as was usual on such trips, were to go to the Black Sea and take in grain for a home or continental port. Now, I thought, here is my opportunity in life: Do a sort of "grand tour" along this side of the Mediterranean I must, somehow; and about the best place to begin is Constantinople, and work west from there. Then, before I had decided by what ruse my being discharged at the Turkish capital could be brought about, we were ordered to Cardiff. There I found another "tramp" loading for the very spot which I wished to reach, and managed to be one of the crew. Olaf and Ivor were going to the north, on their way home; so we parted company—sorry to leave each other, but laughing and cheerful all the same.

What a day to me it was when our ugly *Argo* turned her black, rust-streaked nose up the Golden Horn! After lightening her, just above Stamboul Bridge—during which time I, as night-watchman, made sundry interest-

ing expeditions to the Grand Bazaar and elsewhere—we went up to finish unloading at the Arsenal. About mid-afternoon of the day following our move, I went ashore and immediately spied, up a steep, narrow street on my right, a plain, black sign hanging out and bearing, in good, white letters, the legend: "First and Last." Hello, I said to myself, here's something English, anyhow. Then up and in I went. The place proved to be a little *caravanserai* with, as I supposed, a big, fat Turk behind the bar; while about the single room there were some ten or twelve Armenians in English garb, except for their red fezes. Evidently there was a mistake somewhere. What could this podgy, baggy-breeched follower of the Prophet be doing with such a sign over his doorway? Some one must have painted it for him, to attract British seamen. Ah, well! "Can I have a small Bass?" I inquired.

Not a word was said in answer. The other customers kept up their conversation in what appeared to be Turkish. But the elderly barman soon waddled across to me, drew the cork from the bottle he carried, filled my glass; then, while he was counting out the Turkish change for my florin, he said—

"It's a feen day, me lad."

By the black dog of Mahomet and all the beards of all the prophets that ever were! I thought, what does this mean? Then I blurted out, looking up into his grizzled, fatherly face, "I took you for a Turk!"

"M'm, that's ye're mistaak. Niver taak a mon for onything till ye've knaan him ten year or run away wi' his wife, then ye knaa that he's eether a vara wise man or a fule," he remarked pleasantly.

Then I found that all the other men were English artificers, engaged in the Arsenal, mostly from the west, but with a sprinkling from Newcastle; and that the supposed Turk was a Sunderland man, a Crimean veteran

who had felt the touch of Florence Nightingale's soothing hand. He had taken his discharge on leaving Scutari hospital, settled down in Constantinople, and had been twice to Sunderland in some thirty years. He had so named his little hostelry because it was the first that one met outside the Arsenal gates and the last before entering. Long before this, I expect, his portly figure was carried away to that small piece of holy ground above Pera.

Now I began to puzzle my brains on how to get clear of the "tramp." I was determined that, by hook or by crook, she should take me no farther. But how to effect my desire I could see no way except feigning illness; and if I did so she would spoil my plans by picking me up when she came down from the Black Sea—unless chance or my wits should enable me to double her on that occasion. Thus came the morning of the last day; and, driven to desperation by the unkind lack of coincidence in my fate, I gave out that I was suffering from a terrible pain just under the buckle of my belt. When relieved from duty I made all haste to my bunk, hugging my middle with both hands and turning in "all standing," even to my boots—half to give some finish to the part and half to get my face hidden on the pillow, lest a latent sense of humour should spoil my purpose. How I rolled in mimicked agony on that straw pallet! How I groaned out muddled answers when the mate asked me where the pain was, if I had eaten anything that disagreed with me, etc.! And how I lay in fear of exposure and furtively watching the fo'c'sle-doorway when I was left alone! If the manager of Grimsby theatre, who had once offered me twenty-five shillings a week to become a humble wearer of the sock and buskin, alternately, had seen me then and known the truth he would have doubled his offer at once. I knew that I might have any one of three or four acute gastric

troubles, and no one be able to say that I hadn't, unless some interfering medico should discover that there was no "temperature" to back me up in the lie. How on earth to get such a *desideratum* without real danger I did not know, and had to leave that matter to the gods. However, either the latter or something else saw me safely through. About two o'clock in the afternoon, just before the vessel moved away from her berth, the "old man" took me to the English hospital. By evening, when I knew that it was safe to let the "pain" die away, my packet was somewhere near the eastern end of the Bosphorus. But for the sake of appearances I gave out from time to time that there were a few "stabs" in the region of the feigned trouble. My purpose having been achieved, I had no desire to pass the precious days in a sort of durance vile. The doctor, who bore my patronymic and perhaps felt a kindred touch on that score, said it would be better for me to remain where I was till my ship returned. I thought otherwise. I had brought with me a change of linen, my "Journal" and a certain stock of money—the last having been carried from England for the purpose of that "grand tour," but was not to be drawn upon except in dire necessity. So it was that I entered on a short sojourn at the British Sailors' Mission, and made an unpremeditated descent into the midst of some Howling Dervishes, which came about in this wise.

Within a stone's throw of the hospital windows there stood a small mosque; it had apparently once been a stable or other similar building. At its eastern corner was a mainmast-like minaret, that would have made any but the Prophet's most devout of followers afraid to ascend, lest his weight should bring it down in a heap. On the previous Friday the ranting fanatics who frequented the place made things hideous with a peculiarly piercing and dismal chant. Their droning annoyed me.

I began to cogitate how I could get a sight of that nerve-ruining concert. But the approach to their temple was, to me and all whom I then knew, a mystery. It was situated near the edge of a labyrinth of ramshackle out-buildings and paltry hovels of houses. An oblique lane, an eight-foot blank wall, and half-a-dozen low, rambling roofs separated the mosque from the next building to the hospital.

My first reappearance in the outer world after my "convalescence" happened on a Monday, the occasion being a visit to the Consul's office to report my return to a condition of seaworthiness. I then devoted some attention to the exact topography of the mosque of those offending Howlers. Baffled in my attempt to find an easy means of access to the mosque, and much exasperated thereat, I went to the Mission. But the Dervishes were too interesting to be readily forgotten. Surely a sect that could howl so long and dismally must have some curious and remarkable rites!

After spending three days in a general survey of the city, I determined to see those Dervishes, come ill or well of the venture; at the same time it had then grown to be a permanent article of my faith that I should issue safely from any "experience" that I undertook, within reason—my reason, that is. On that day my natural thirst for knowledge (sometimes enviously spoken of as "his besetting sin of curiosity," at others spitefully said to be meddling) would, I believe, have driven me to dare the terrors of silken strangling cords, weighted sacks, secret culverts, and all the mythical terrors of the East. A second reconnaissance clinched a previous idea that the most direct way to my objective lay *over* the intervening roofs. A glance right and left showed me a clear lane. I made a rush across the alley and sprang at the wall. Securing a hold, I drew myself to the top of the first barrier. On my offended hearing came the war-note

of the enemy—a wailing howl, such as would surely set on edge even the teeth of a deaf man. Before me was the goal of my curiosity, with the dirty white little minaret as a landmark, a huge note of exclamation on its people's outrage of other folks' artistic feelings. Over the low ridge of the first hovel I went on hands and knees, it having been built within easy reach of the wall. Between it and the next roof, however, was a gap on which I had not reckoned. To leap the distance would not have required much uncommon agility, but I did not know who was underneath to hear the racket of my English shoes on those old Eastern tiles. With means and force so limited I could not afford to court encounters which might bar the way to that mysterious mosque.

A quick survey showed me some narrow boards standing on end against a building opposite, about ten feet to my right. Soon I was squatting directly in front of them, trying to throw the bight of a piece of string over the end of the outer board. (A sailor is said never to be without a rope yarn or a piece of string in his pocket; perhaps that is why I am never without such a thing even in these days.) Patient effort was ultimately rewarded. With two of the boards—little more than battens—placed across that ten-foot gulf I essayed the crossing, using one board for each hand and knee. When about half-over I heard a footstep beneath. A bound followed, and fingers were fastened convulsively on my left shoe. The jerk they gave dislodged me, but in such wise that in coming down and swinging towards their interfering owner my right foot struck him fairly under his chin, sending him to earth and allowing me to sway in the opposite direction. A natural monkey-like deftness—developed by many struggles aloft in gales of wind—had enabled me to retain a hold on one board, so that by the time my antagonist was on his feet I had swung myself up again, had gained the opposite side of

the alley, and was standing at bay with one of my boards as a weapon. The man—he was apparently a Greek—first scowled savagely up at me, then smiled reassuringly; but the change was too abrupt to gain my confidence.

“Ah, Shjonny,” he said, with the softness of a cobra’s glide through wet grass; “you come down—I got something good for you.”

“Hand it up,” was my laconic answer. “What is good up here may be bad down there.”

“No, you see—you come.”

“Yes, if I come I shall see, and feel too,” said I.

The Greek was evidently at a loss how to proceed with his attempt at diplomacy. After glancing at me several times, then about him, he answered, “Look, I show you,” and entered the hovel over which I had passed. Quick as the thought that he had probably gone for some weapon to shoot me with, I turned and slipped over the ridge of the roof I was on. When he reappeared I was safely housed behind a chimney-stack watching him. To judge by his manner he was greatly puzzled to know what had become of me. He darted about, now in my sight, then out of it. He had something in his hand that looked very like a silver bowl, and all his movements were curiously stealthy. Some vague instinct set me wondering whether I had not chanced upon an adventure of more importance than even a stolen view of the Howling Dervishes at worship. What was this man, fairly well-dressed, doing amongst those tumble-down hovels with a large silver article openly in his possession? If he is here by right, I thought, why does he not fetch me down at once instead of being so quiet and mysterious? However, he soon afterwards disappeared into the hovel. I waited and watched for his return; but he came not. The intermittent howling in my rear repeatedly called me to my primary object. It at length

became so insistent that it seemed to contain a sort of upbraiding for my neglect. Unable further to withstand the call, and having lost interest in my assailant, I turned again to that which had drawn me from the bald path of rectitude.

The next building was gained by a careful stride; so I went on to the one touching the mosque. Now the object of my desire seemed to be within easy reach. My purpose was to get over the mosque into a small space beyond, on to which (the Armenian porter of the hospital had assured me) there must be windows opening, through one of which I could gain a view of the interior of the mosque. How I should get back from this point was a problem which I left to the patron saint of adventurous curiosity; my only consideration was to reach the vantage-point. To that end I gave all thought; yet with it there was some shadowy intention of exploring the inside of the place, should luck allow me an opportunity on the dispersion of the congregation, whose howls were now painfully near.

Forward I pressed, careful to go quietly, in mind of what ears were possibly under me. But I had reckoned without one probable eventuality—the eyes which might be above me. That such were in evidence became all too apparent just as I began to crawl up the thatched roof of the mosque, which was almost flat. Loud and clear on the sleepy, sunlit air came three distinct cries of alarm, from too officious, interfering busybodies on buildings which overtopped the scene of my thirst for knowledge. Of course, my English apparel openly informed on me in the vital matter of religion, and so, to the Moslem mind, betrayed criminal intent. But on the point of determination to see and learn all about the Howlers' mosque I had burnt my boats, so to speak. I had crossed the Rubicon of my purpose, and must go forward at all costs. So I put on speed, meaning to

get over the mosque and into the sheltering space beyond ere the troublers around drew others' attention to me. I got midway between gutter and ridge. Another minute would have found me out of sight of those prying eyes, whose owners' hatred of their yelling disturbers should have surely obtained me freedom of action. But lo! without the slightest warning the miserable thatch gave way and dropped me into the very midst of the howling circle!

Their "*Allah-illa-Allah*" ceased abruptly as I appeared. Owing to the lowness of the roof and to a considerable portion of it having fallen under me, my only hurt was a shaking that in nowise incommoded my movements, the bearings of the case considered. There lingers with me yet a faint recollection of how those astonished Howlers, sitting cross-legged in a circle, gazed stupidly at me, as though a second Mahomet had descended so suddenly—in the guise of a hated Christian—as to deprive them of all power of speech.

The danger of the situation sharpened my wits. I spied an egress, leapt to my feet, and made for it. My movement seemed to bring the stupefied Dervishes to their senses with a jerk. Had I remained there on the broken thatch they might have gaped at me until they fell asleep, such was their open-mouthed wonder at my appearance from the sky, as they possibly supposed.

But now, evidently fully awake to the whole matter, they came on, like keen hounds after prey; and as that prey I moved, taking the precaution of banging the door to as I passed out. On the outer side of the door there was a key, probably left thus when the Dervishes went to worship; and my start was such that I was able to turn the key ere the pursuers were much more than on their feet. Now came the moment of uncertainty. Whither should I go, which way turn, in that strange

labyrinth of hovels, where one tortuous alley was as dangerous to me as another? I had gone with a light heart into the escapade, sublimely regardless of its probable dangers, and without a thought of its possible results. Which way should I turn? Before me was a small open space, flanked by another building at a slight angle to the one at my back. I glanced to the left, where the open ground extended a few feet clear of the end of the mosque. Then to the right went my gaze, and I saw the reason why those within were not clamouring at the door. They were climbing through the apertures which served as windows! So to the left I rushed, the muttering of the rising storm swelling in my ears. Around the corner of the temple and across its end I tore, failing to find the outlet for which I had hoped. The next corner was doubled madly. Then I pulled up suddenly, faced by a wedge-like trap formed by the walls of the mosque and its neighbouring building on that side! I could have howled even as the Dervishes did—but rage, not devotion, would have been the reason of my doing so.

The patter of my pursuers' feet could be heard behind. I made a leap at the gutter of the hovel on my right. It came away in my hand like a piece of rotten match-board! In wild impotence I flung myself at the slit of an opening between the corners of the two buildings. Where at ordinary times I should have found myself too large by one third, I now went through as if greased. Up to the slit came my enemies; but even the thinnest of them could not wedge himself through. They tried the opening in turns, meanwhile flinging at me whatever could be found to serve as a missile, all in the space of a minute.

That was where I made the one great mistake of my retreat. During this part of it I should have raced for the opposite side of the mosque and so away. But I

waited and watched their futile efforts to get at me. My attention was forcibly drawn to my error by the sudden patter of feet from the direction in which I should have gone. Now I was trapped indeed! On every side high blank walls faced me. Out of the savage clutches of these fanatics there now seemed no escape. Suddenly, on the opposite side of the minaret, I saw a tall bamboo pole leaning against the wall. Scarcely was this seen ere I was up it and on to the roof of the mosque again, with the pole in my hands. How the Dervishes stamped, evidently heaping on me all the maledictions known to the Turkish tongue! How they savagely hunted for missiles! How they shook their fists at me, poor, ill-dressed ascetics that they were!

Then they changed from impotent raging to a disquieting action dictated by common-sense. I had moved towards the ridge of the mosque. Their only means of getting at me was to come up. Ladders may have existed in that locality; but whether they did or not my pursuers did not seem to think of them. My first intimation of their purpose was seeing two of them stand side by side at the end of the building, near the minaret, and a third clamber up their backs. The climber's hands were on the edge of the thatch when out went my pole, on which he did not seem to have reckoned. The end of it landed squarely on his chest, and he went toppling backwards. The fall, however, hurt others more than himself. He fell on the heads of some shouters behind. I now began to think of getting back by the way I had used as an approach. But ere I could put the thought into action my enemies were clamouring and struggling over each other at the junction of the two buildings, thus effectively barring my way; for, as quickly as I could shove one down with the pole another appeared on the backs of other supporters, on both sides of that narrow opening. Even if lucky with every prodding blow of my blunt

lance, I could only keep up such a defence until they were tired, and then escape back to the lane. But I had serious doubts whether I could continue to repel the boarders. Two of the Howlers, stronger and more agile than their fellows, had made grabs at the pole, and one had come dangerously near wrenching it away.

This finally decided my course of action. I would put forth special efforts to cause a break in the stream of assailants, then take a wild leap from corner to corner, trusting to my nimbleness, the pole, and good fortune to gain safety. Scarcely was this determination made when it had to be abandoned. Two of the enemy came up at the same moment. Whilst I knocked down the nearer one, getting the bamboo home on his jaw, and almost losing it through the violent contact and my own insecure footing, the other turned aside in his spring and gained the roof of the hovel over which I should have to go back—not, however, before I had made the end of the pole thud on his ribs as he scrambled up. I now noticed that a very undesirable thing had happened—our theatre of action had become the object of too many eyes and tongues on some high flat roofs at a little distance.

My last blow was an unlucky one. It turned the tide of battle, and caused me to deem discretion the better part of valour. The long reach necessary to make the blow effective occasioned a loss of command over the pole. Before I could recover my former grip of it and my own balance, the thing went clattering down between the two buildings. With a rush my enemies were again at the junction of the two corners, reaching over each other until six or seven skinny arms were stretched out towards the coveted prize, but no one of them could touch it within some inches.

I gave a quick look at the Dervish opposite. Although apparently somewhat disabled, he was too big for me,

especially with a crowd at my heels. Out of the dilemma there was now but one way. Round I swung on the instant and over the ridge. I had slid to the ground on the other side and was away before they knew of my action. Across the few yards of open space I flew, doubled a corner, and tore down a winding alley, with the fear of death lending speed to my heels. For who would be a whit the wiser if these infuriated Howlers overtook and made an end of me in the surrounding Turkish slums? I could hear the pat-pat, pat-pat of the naked soles of my enemies on the narrow, gutter-like street behind. Onwards I tore, past the entrance to other noisome alleys which were scarcely seen ere left behind, while the air resounded with cries of the pursuers and the watchers on top of the houses that bounded the slums. The mob behind swelled as inhabitants of the quarter trooped out to ascertain what the noise was about, but all ahead remained comparatively quiet. Thus the mad race progressed. My bearings were forgotten; I strove solely for one end—to keep out of the enemy's clutches. For a main thoroughfare I could seek later on, but for the present my efforts were devoted to eluding capture.

As matters were going I should probably have reached a safer locality before ending the run had it not been for a bulky old Turk who lumbered suddenly out from a cross-lane. I turned half aside to dodge him, but—too late! We collided sideways. As a billiard ball from the cushion I bounded off bodily in an oblique direction, my neck feeling as though it had been badly wrenched. Then came a series of sensations—a thud, a fall through breaking boards, and a sudden stoppage in semi-darkness. As I afterwards ascertained, I had cannoned off the Turk into the doorless entrance of a disused building in the cross-alley, struck against a partition joining the doorpost, and fallen through the rotten flooring into a

cellar, where I now lay—bruised, breathless, and half-stunned.

Cries and general clamourings without quickly brought me to a sense of my position. I arose—thankful that no bones were broken—and silently mounted the debris, until I could catch a peep of the scene without. Then I scuttled back into the darkness. At the crossing of the lanes the crowd had gathered, its members gaping all ways at once. My mysterious disappearance was evidently the subject of hot argument and inquiry. The old Turk stood in the middle, his clothes dirtied by his roll across that muddy lane. He was obviously too dazed to speak intelligently.

Prudence bade me be moving, whilst amazement and indecision held the enemy at the crossing. After some exploring of my cellar I found an opening which looked out on to another alley, apparently running parallel to the one of my flight. Here all was quiet; only the distant exclamations of the Howlers and their friends broke the stillness. All the houses, too, seemed to be uninhabited. Should I risk chance eyes and make another dash for freedom and safety, or remain there till nightfall? I decided to take my chances, and as quickly and quietly as possible I crept out. A main street was soon reached, and an hour later I passed safely into the Mission. But the following day Nemesis got upon my tracks. All the men, five of us, were mustered before a deputation from the Howlers, who had in some way or other got to know of my whereabouts. I was singled out without any hesitation. It was strenuously maintained that no desecration was meant. All the same, material and moral damages cost me two pounds, and the Consul said I had got off lightly at that. I was told, moreover, that my life might settle the affair if I remained in Constantinople.

CHAPTER IX

Missionary ways—Ugly rumours—Cheating my ship—I visit Stamboul again, to my pleasure and pain—Human nature paramount—Bad manners rewarded—An unequal battle—Befriended—A fair companion—In a “sing-song”—“To the Herald of Night”—Interrupted dreams—A congenial spirit—Precious papers—Earning a hundred piastres—At a fair—Bloody Constantinople.

THE only further unpleasant outcome of the mosque affair was a widening in the mental and moral chasm that separated the Missionary and me. Up to then the only one of his kind who had really repelled me was the one in charge of the Sailors' Home in Marseilles. So far, as I had never missed an opportunity to explore picture galleries, museums, cathedrals, and other old buildings, also to visit theatres, opera houses, etc., whether or not I understood a word of the performance, it had likewise been my habit, and that of my companions, to go honestly to Sailors' Missions on Sunday evenings, or to some other place of worship. But the suave “unction” of those two “sky-pilots” made me turn my back on Heaven whenever *they* brought it along. As to this one, all idea of our ever meeting on common ground was discarded by me from the outset. Yet the matter had a humorous side, for which reason I did make one certain effort to meet him half-way. All the hymns he favoured were either of the Sankey and Moody pattern or of a funeral sort. These so jarred on my taste that I suggested an improved assortment, showed him a sample of what I considered would better please his congregations, was severely taken to task for

my "want of idea as to the correct fitness of things," and thereafter went my separate way to the English church in Pera—not without reminders as to the un-wisdom of my being out after nightfall, lest I should meet any of the Dervishes into whose presence I had lately descended; or be taken for one of the Armenians, whose rising in the Turkish metropolis was then talked of as a likely occurrence. Yet fate had other adventures in store for me, and, I believed, happenings of greater distinction.

I was supposed to hold myself in readiness for my ship, which, as I learnt at the Consul's office, was on her way down. But, determined that my stay in the city of Constantine should begin a fine set of pages in the diary of my life, I took occasions to wander abroad. By this means I "missed" my "tramp," being away on the heights when I saw her pass down the Bosphorus. Another man was taken in my place; my money and effects were left at the Consul's, and I was free to wander at will over Southern Europe. Of course there was the usual consular lecture at my being left behind; but it fell on heedless ears, as did the Missionary's. The Consul kept my wages and paid for my keep out of them. As for the money taken out from England: I had sailed with an old A.B. who sewed covered sovereigns as buttons on his old clothes, and I had done the same on my underclothing; so that I cared not what the Consul honestly did with my wages.

On the morning after I found myself a free-seeker after knowledge, I began to ask myself if it were worth while to remain longer in the city of Constantine. There were ugly rumours about as to trouble between the Turks and the Armenians in the place, and of bloodshed being likely at any hour. I *knew* that if this happened it would be one of those butcheries that make an Englishman's blood boil, and not a safe thing for a human "sky-

rocket" to be near. So I thought it would be wise of me to strike my camp, either afoot or afloat. With this idea at the back of my mind, I crossed the bridge into Stamboul, took another look at the old Seraglio and the mosque of Mohammed II, regretted that the latter was no longer the Christian church of St. Sophia, then wandered off to the great bazaar and some further trouble.

After strolling a while in that meeting-place of Europe and Asia, and wishing that I could buy a few of those very fine things, if only for the sweets of possession, I was pulled up by the humanity of a particular scene. (Here, in order that the reader shall set down nothing in extenuation against me, I hasten to say that my action, while being quite natural, was likewise reprehensible in the highest degree; also that I was a very young man with a big tree full of green ideas, and a mind that was stocked with old literature to the utter seclusion of the new.) A native woman was apparently out shopping. Physical evidence went to prove that she was not elderly, nor too indiscreetly young. She stood behind a sort of curtain in one of those small, open shops which are met with everywhere in the East, and was, apparently, trying on certain garments. Her unsophisticatedness was so like my own that it had a decided charm for me, who had chanced in between two stalls, thus coming upon the scene as Venus said Mars did upon her at the bath. But I gave out no surprise, although she was looking that way; nor was she in anything like the same condition as the goddess was. Chivalry and correct taste bade me turn away; human nature said that, the circumstances considered, it was a sight not to be missed because of a puritan upbringing. I gazed on, drawn by a subtlety which I no more understood than attempted to analyze; meanwhile the shopman was serving other customers on the near side of the curtain.

Then came the jar that made realistic prosaism of my poetry, in the matter of mood and contemplation. Like a whip of wind, only with more force and pain, came a hand on the side of my face, and I went reeling sideways. On regaining my balance, I discovered that the blow had come from a stalwart Turk, whose flashing glance at once assured me that he had temporarily constituted himself the champion of wronged Turkish womanhood. However, had he been Gargantua and Mahomet in one, he had struck me, and the only law I recognized at the moment was *lex talionis*. On the tradesman's broad, outwardly sloping display-board were some beaten brass and copper hand-bowls. These were now so close to my right hand that, before the Turk was aware of the action, I had hurled one straight at his face. My aim was true. It was his turn to reel backwards, though not as my smaller weight had done under his blow; but I had the pleasure of seeing blood run from his cheek.

The two actions had taken up only a minute or so. Now others stopped to look on, some seriously, some amused. The shopman leaned through his sashless window; his customer came forward and blocked the doorway. These features of the scene impressed themselves on my mind less any help from me, all my attention being instantly absorbed by the Turk. Naturally enough, he made for me with something akin to murder in his eyes and bearing. His face seemed to say: What, you little Christian whelp, you dare to strike *me*, here in the Grand Bazaar of Stamboul! But his eagerness was my ally. As he rushed forward, I made use of my old trick, literally flinging myself at his shins. His fall was a heavy one, for he fell solidly; it knocked the wind out of him, and he lay there a moment. I was up again, wondering what move to make next, seeing that it must be no common one, and quite cognizant of the great

disadvantage under which I laboured. I might avail myself of a weapon from one of the neighbouring stalls, for the gaping crowd stood well-back, some of its members plainly giving me looks of admiration; but unless it were a sword, or something similar, what would be the use of it against one almost twice my match in weight and size? Again, if I acted on the offensive, the crowd might take sides against me. Then where should I be?—a suffering English dinghy on very stormy Moslem waters. No—I instinctively remembered several instances of a crowd's sympathy for the small one in a fight. Besides, I knew the value of appearing the aggrieved party at such times, and instantly decided that this must be my line of policy—not forgetting to inflict what punishment lay in my power during the process.

My opponent began to move. I swept on those around a look of injury—a sort of eye-request for protection. Here I saw that the shopman had secured his bowl again, and that one of the spectators—who had probably witnessed the whole affair—was apparently explaining matters to him and his fair customer. Another thing that forced itself on to my observation was the encouraging expression in her eyes, then smilingly fixed on me. Womanlike, although my initial offence was one of too ardent admiration of herself, she admired me for it.

Now there came a new and more disturbing phase on the affair. The big Turk was on his feet again, and in his hand a small fine dagger, produced from the folds of his great waistband. In his passion and discomfiture he had evidently lost control of himself. But that occupied no place in my thoughts, which were solely bent on how to defend myself against his murderous design. The slight involuntary scream of a Zingari girl in the front edge of the spectators gave accentuation to the matter. Our glances met. My head swung half

around, and I encountered the gaze of the breeches-purchaser.

Instantly a new thought occurred to me. So kind was her look that I leapt straightway to her feet, knelt, and said, "Madame, I meant no harm. Will you not speak for me?" Then, remembering what I had heard about French being known so well in the city, I stammered out a few disjointed, broken and half-intelligible words in that language. At once she lifted a hand to stay her evil-meaning compatriot; but he had already stopped, and, possibly seeing the foolishness of his action, he was putting up his steel.

The fracas was over. The small crowd, relieved from the weight of suspense caused by seeing the dagger, began to move about, and much talk ensued. The woman—of respectable standing, to judge by the deference paid her—returned into the shop, and I followed; the Turk looking after me, smiling, yet seeming to hanker strongly for an opportunity to wring my in-offensive neck. Within the shop my rescuer turned those great luminous eyes on me again, she smiling under her *yashmak*, I was sure, and said in English—

"No, you not stand here. You—where you live?—where you sleep?"

"At the English Mission House," was my reply.

"Then you stand there" (pointing to the doorway). "Turkman not hurt you more. I go soon, Galata—you come, same."

I understood, thanked her—more with eyes than tongue, for I felt an ambition to be expressive as herself in that way. She seemed pleased, flashed me an answering look, and I returned to the doorway. Only a few of the spectators remained watching this sequel of the affair. The Turk was sponging his face with some cold water at an adjacent stall. When she was ready, I insisted on carrying her parcel, and those persons who

were still about eyed us stolidly from the place as though the matter was one of no further interest. At the bridge over the Golden Horn I won more pleasing glances and soft words by refusing to let her pay our toll. Otherwise she scarcely spoke until we were about to part within sight of my temporary domicile. Then her words were a few cautionary ones anent my taking care not to meet the big Turk in Stamboul or any unfrequented place. With that she took her parcel, murmured something in Turkish as her warm gaze rested on my face, and she was gone.

Being so near the place of my dwelling, I thought it would be as well to have tea there, and in I accordingly went. When the meal was over, a young fellow-lodger—with whom I had enjoyed several talks on seafaring topics—said that he had discovered an excellent “sing-song” near the quay, and asked me to join him in a visit there. Since the sad occurrence in Marseilles I had been to few such places. The afternoon’s happening had somewhat stirred my former latent love of brightness, so I bore him company—to my speedy regret.

Soon, very soon, the place brought back to memory a recollection of that hellish scene in the French port. The swarthy cut-throat faces around; the *blasè* visages of the Jewish women; the infernal liquor; the foul tobacco-smoke; the discordant wheezing of a “melodeon” in one corner—the whole Hades-like appearance of the place caused my gorge to rise. Clean merriment—devilment, even—I loved; roguishness of a kind was part and parcel of me, it ran in my blood as lime in some waters; but *this*—this degrading reminder that men and women are animals, and sometimes worse, I did not like. It made me spurn myself. My mood was other than it; and I arose and went forth—out into the gutter-streets, amongst the mongrel dogs, for such scenes and companions were infinitely better than the

ill-lighted hell behind; out to the clear, gentle twilight of that most kind of climates, into heaven by comparison, though its streets were veritable slums in contrast to those of other cities. Quickly I found my way to the edge of the blue Bosphorus, down the upper part of which night was creeping like a calm, beautiful spirit of rest on a hot, troublous scene. Over the hills on the eastern side a single star bespoke the world's rolling that part of its face into darkness, as if to hide the too conscious wrong-doings of its dwellers.

Mechanically I drew paper and pencil from my pockets, and wrote by the fading light—

O silver Star in sky of evening grey,
That comes as marches west the monarch sun;
That gentle comes, presaging lovely night;
That comes the herald of your queen, the Moon!
O Star of beauty!—beauty lone and still;
Nun-like in grey-toned azure 'twixt the lights;
The forefront, single, of yon marshalled host
Of glittering worlds now rising slowly o'er
The vaguely-lined, yet deeper darkening, rim
That marks th' illimitable world of space
Between our world and yours: O Star! pale beam
Of mystic light, unswerving symbol, proof
Of Nature's out-mapped course, say whence you come,
Or whither go! From what mysterious source
Of things you gain your wonderfully fair
Effulgent glow! Whence comes your age-marked pomp
Of stately ordered beauty, gentle, sweet?
No vapour-curtains screen your changeless light;
Fogs, rain and cloud are all with us: say whence
Comes this—O Flame of query! whence?—
Bid me go ask the tides their secret source,
The winds their place of birth. Yet if I read
Your hidden message right, it is that I
Should shine my best, whatever hazes dim
The sight of those who look on what I do;
That, come what may, to mine own self I must
Be true,—as you to your celestial path,
O lovely, steadfast harbinger of Night! . . .

This I superscribed "To the Herald of Night," then fell to pondering on the history of the dirty city behind me, and the legends of the fair water in front. . . .

Night proper had come. The moon was rising away to my left. A voice said to me in low, curiously masterful tones, "What for you sit there? You want to die?"

I glanced around and upward, dimly descried, quite close, an Armenian—whom I had noticed during my set-to with the big Turk—and arose to my feet, as he added something anent my late enemy chancing along, and pushing me into the water that rippled just below where my feet had dangled. I braggartly replied that I cared nothing for the Mussulman, big as he was; but I strangely felt that I cared something for the man at my side, although he was no larger than myself, except that more years than were mine had knitted his frame into a compactness to which I could lay no claim. What his name was never transpired in my hearing. He wore a neat pointed black beard. His upper lip was unshaven. The cast of his features roused a slight suspicion of Semitic blood, yet they were as finely cut as those of any ancient Greek. His eyes were fairly large, dark and brilliant; and about him there lurked, to me, a curious magnetism which I never attempted to analyze.

"Why you sit there?" he asked again, looking me through the while.

"Oh, for nothing in particular," said I. "It was my mood, and I just sat there because it suited me to."

"You dream?" he remarked in his quiet, interrogative fashion.

"Well, yes, sometimes."

"Ah, dreams are good—they bring no trouble when they not leave the head. But actions—ah, there is folly!" he said, mainly with a French accent, particularly on the last word.

"Sometimes," replied I, trying to seem wise, and feeling myself to be in the presence of no common man.

"Sometimes the dreamer benefits his fellows, but without the worker the world would be stagnant."

"Good—you see, you think," said he, a new brightness taking the place of that touch of pathos marking his former observation. "You are young; but you—you see past *the* face of things."

I was flattered. My vanity was stirred, and I ventured another small intuitive, philosophic opinion. "Dreamers and doers are happy or miserable according to temperament," said I—"at least I think so."

"Where you learn to think like this?" he asked, evidencing a new interest.

"Nowhere."

"M'm."

Silence marked the next few moments. He appeared to be thinking deeply. A Turk passed, giving us a questioning glance as he went by. My companion was lost in thought. This gave me occasion to note him more closely, as he stared past me, apparently regardless of my presence. In this occupation I was engaged when his gaze returned to my face. He looked steadily into my eyes, then at my hands, and said, pointing to the piece of paper I still held, "What you do—write?"

"Yes," said I, simply.

"Ah, writing bad in Turkey. Nothing good here but thinking, and that make you mad. What you say—you like to learn some new thing?"

Again his manner had changed, this time from a pathetic despair to a quick, alert impatience that seemed to promise something rare and good. I as readily answered, "Yes." He said, "Come," and together we travelled up the side of the Bosphorus. Not a word was said as we went along, turned to our left, passed the Sultan's white palace, then up street after street on the hill-side that overhangs Galata. For some time this

silence had been oppressive; then my companion entered an ill-lit thoroughfare that seemed to extend along the back of an irregular row of big houses, and he said, in a very low voice—

“If you see a person tell it to me—anywhere.”

This at once quickened my stagnant senses. What did it mean? Were there such things as secret police in this city of the Caliphs? Monstrous! “Abdul the Damned” and “the Sick Man of Europe” were to me but mere names in politics, which, in turn, were no more to my scheme of things than a fifth wheel is to a coach. From mystery and romance I had jarringly jumped to modernity and other unpleasantness. Naturally, I immediately began to watch every point possible, and to think of quitting the matter without delay. Before I had quite made up my mind what to say, the Armenian seemed to stumble against a door in a wall. Six paces farther on he suddenly wheeled about, saying, “Come,” in the same low tones as before. I hastened after him, more mystified than ever, and certainly thinking that there was, indeed, something in the wind. I was wondering if it would be wise to speak at all, when we again arrived at the door, which suddenly opened, and in we went—without a word. While the custodian of the door followed us, my companion led me into a house, a big place in which there seemed to be very little light. There he left me in a large apartment, where the furniture was a mixture of Eastern and European, the place being apparently used as a reception-room. Now, I asked myself, what is going to happen?—some big “experience,” surely! This can’t be a common affair. Then I heard voices on the other side of an arras, beyond which the man had passed, and would have sworn that one of them was the voice of the one whose interesting occupation in the bazaar had made me forget my manners. While appearing to be interested in the ornaments, I drew nearer to the

curtains, for the purpose of hearing those tones more distinctly. I did so, and felt more sure that she was there. Yet how could it be her? reason asked. It was all so baffling. Then the Armenian came forth, with a small packet of papers in one hand.

"You take this to —," he said, giving me an address in Pera, "and you receive one hundred piastres."

"What's in it?" I inquired.

"Nothing."

"Are they documents?"

"What?"

"Have they got writing on them—letters, or something of that?"

"Yes, yes—nothing but writing."

"Revolutionary?" He did not understand, so I had to explain. Running the risk of a Russian prison, with the possible help of British authorities to get a young fool out of a scrape, was a different affair from the same sort of thing where unpremeditated strangulation, a sack and the Bosphorus might be the quick end of the matter. No, I began to think that I had seen enough of Constantinople, and had half-made up my mind to go West on the following day. He, however, assured me that the papers were merely valuable ones which he wanted to have delivered at once, and had no sedition in them. Still the reward—nearly twenty-one shillings—for so small a service made me suspicious. At that moment I lifted my gaze to the arras, and saw between the two portions a *yashmak*, two brilliant eyes, and a head of black hair—then only the curtains. Whether that was her or not, I felt it was, and said that if he would give me his name and the address of that house, I would take the papers. He gave them. At his direction I strapped the little parcel to my body, under my outer clothes; then went my way, delivered it, got the money, and an hour afterwards I was in bed, sleepily framing a sonnet to "a rose Damascus, purpled of the east, a bulbul

singing in the noisome night." Oh, the muddled expressions of indiscreet doings in unripe years! And yet, alas! generally they are not muddled enough! Greater involution would mean less understanding by the "fool many," who find such abounding interest in the mere fact that those who have more brains than they have are generally just as human in certain ways. Men largely, but women more so, delight in little evidences that their neighbours are no better than themselves.

On the following morning my first excursion—during which I weighed up the costs and profits of beginning my "grand tour" by land *versus* by water—led me through the Pera tunnel and out to the Sweet Waters of Europe. There I found many others making a pleasure-day of it; groups of stolid-faced Turks and their *yashmakked* womenfolk were standing about singing and dancing gipsies. Like the great bazaar in Stamboul, the whole scene had the cosmic variety, the homogeneousness of life; it drew me in, and at the moment I should not have cared a para who had seen me there. The world says that we take our pleasures sadly; but the Mohammedan in Turkey takes them in a funereal mood. However, on this occasion I was disposed to give the lie on that libel concerning us, and a potent factor in this matter suddenly appeared in the person of that same Zingari girl who had witnessed my scrimmage in the Grand Bazaar. Whilst her two companions played a zither and a tambourine, she seductively disported herself in a dance that had many evolutions, and showed a decidedly fair amount of shapely limbs. Her glittering black eyes soon recognized me—the comparatively sombre-clad and alien item in that more sombrely circled-in gaiety, which there and then took such possession of me that on to the greensward I leapt and joined the girl in her dance—not to entertain the serious noodles around, but out of very exuberance of spirits, and to be one with the swarthy beauty who

was paying her respects to Terpsichore. I pass by the spectators' heavy astonishment and the gipsy's wiles to keep me there longer—which at another time would have had their desired effect. The mood had passed. I severed myself from the crowd, feeling that I would like to go up the valley to where the hills purpled together in the declining sun, and spent some time under the big chestnut-trees and the smaller olives and cypresses. Then I bought and ate sweetmeats, as the Turkish women had done all day long, to check my hunger till I could arrive at such solid foods as better suited a British appetite. So went the day, and well it was that a day should go so now and then; for the time was approaching when there would be no such days for me.

Within an hour or so of sunset I chartered a caïque to take me down to Galata—down past the ruin-marked shores; the obsolete, useless ships of war; the wheezing, asthmatical paddle-boats; the small, picturesque sailing craft; the occasional ugly “tramp” steamer; the stinking beaches (not of full account to me, who had no sense of smell); through the beauty and serenity of the hour, the glow of colour on shore to right and left; the reviving associations of past glories and the pathos of decay—down past and through it all, knowing full-well that I should see it only second-handedly; that, while the boatman sent his fairy-like craft skimming along, I should be lost in my own musings. So is the soul seen in things studied, though we may know it not at the time, just as love requires no words for a declaration.

Ah, but that anticipated trip, so admirable an ending to my day of pleasure, was not to be *in extenso*. Before a third of the journey was covered, we were hailed by a policeman at a tumbledown landing-stage on our left. Questions and answers were made in Turkish. Then the boatman pulled in to the place. I was motioned out, and led away by the baggy-breeched constable, wondering if the affair of the previous night was the cause of

this "arrest," and why it was that I had not been requested to pay for the boat's hire. Talk was useless; my custodian could not say a word in English, and for all the Turkish known to me I might have been dumb. Presently he commandeered a passing vehicle plying for hire, and in it we were driven straight to the Mission House. As we went along, signs and marks of commotion became more prominent; till, when we arrived, it was plain to see that something very unusual was going on in the city generally. Inside the Mission, the iron shutters of which were closed and secured and the doors bolted and barred, I immediately learnt what the trouble was—an indiscriminate massacre of Armenians. The average Armenian might be a wily, treacherous individual, unsafe as a friend, dishonest as a trader, unscrupulous as a citizen; but whatever were his faults either as a man or as a member of the community, it was not in accordance with British notions that he should be felled in the streets, like cattle in shambles. Still, although we could now and then hear the terrible cries, all told we were but six, including that unctuous monger of religious platitudes, and with no weapons—except, perhaps, that pretty little toy-revolver stowed secretly amongst my sea-clothing—and two Armenian dependents, the cook and porter, to protect, if the murderers came our way. But let me pass over those two days of enforced confinement. In all respects they were the worst I had ever known; and there was the worrying question: Had I unwittingly contributed to, or in anywise had a hand in, this savage piece of cowardly animalism? I could not tell, and knew not how wise or foolish it would be to make any move in the matter. On my release, I made no bones about getting out of Constantinople, except that it should not be under the Red Ensign.

CHAPTER X

A glorious wandering—The great purpose—In a foreign hospital—Torturing experiments—Home, a cripple—Away once more—A hell afloat—Fisticuffs—Shot—Arrested—Paid off—A great journey—Humours *en route*—"A 'spout! A 'spout!"—A liquid terror—In an awful spell—Devastation alongside—Saved by Providence—A laughable shock—Laid up again.

OH, the comings and goings; the accidents and calamities, humorous occasions and semi-tragedies; the times of superlative joyance and their converse; the escapes from "th' imminent deadly breach" of chance incident, nights of glamour and courted fever under the stars, and all the wandering *etcetera* of the next five months! To record them here, even in some detail, would require half this book. Enough, it was the end-all at which I had aimed; educationally and largely emotionally it was to be the finish of my humble wanderings—an itinerary along the coasts of the ancients, touching wherever circumstances would let me. The beginning occurred in my getting away from Constantinople, three days after the butchery of the Armenians, in a fore-and-after that was skipped by a Greek who could speak some English, and manned by two Italians and a Frenchman. With them I spent three happy months, calling here and there in the Archipelago, Smyrna and other Levantine ports till we reached The Piræus. There, with only a change of underclothing, my "Journal" and my money sewn here and there about me, I left them and took my fill of Athens—a young Englishman, in common, seafaring garb, wandering alone amid the ruins, dreaming his own dreams, "uneyed imagination at the helm," regardless of the groups of chattering European and American tourists.

From Athens I found my way up to Megara, said to be the birthplace of Euclid, that founder of the Megaric school of logic; but more memorable to me because I there first saw Albanians wearing cream-coloured kilts, playing some primitive bagpipes and dancing what was strangely similar to a Scots reel! Thence by way of Kalamak and Corinth I went to Patras, where the skipper of a small French schooner allowed me to work a passage to Malta, and so to the Thames by the same means in a British "tramp."

Now I would cast about for employment ashore to keep me till I could earn a living in literature. Those natural gipsy-propensities and "devilments" were practically gone. The fact had long been apparent to me that they would not satisfy for life. And what was there afloat, to one whose "vaulting ambitions" were always aiming at the stars? No, I would be a "scholar," and write poetry and imaginative fantasias because—because I must. How blessed are the dull who have no aspirations! Neither heavens of anticipation, hill-tops of attainment nor hells of despair are theirs. They are no help to progress—no; but, by Heaven! how evenly happy they are in contrast! Advertising, etc., brought home the truth that no employer wanted such abilities as I had to offer. I became face-to-face with the painful fact that my money was almost gone. There was nothing for it but to ship again. So out to the colonies I went, seeing "the old horse" hove out at the end of the first month, Neptune come aboard on "the line"; and, in "running the easting down," was on the lee-side of an upper-topsail-yard when a "hard-case" A.B. at the yardarm lost his hold, blaspheming the while, and fell into the seething turmoil of waters out of which he never came again, in spite of all efforts to find him. From Melbourne to San Francisco, thence to Antwerp and the Humber, and I found myself in possession of thirty

pounds. This would surely keep me till I secured work on shore. But why not finish the summer up the Baltic, add to my savings, then stay ashore? A good idea, I thought, and acted accordingly. Alas, that I did!

That outward trip left me in Cronstadt hospital, with my right hip in possession of sciatica, like a thief in a man-trap. During nine days and nights I scarcely slept. Then the doctor moved me into a long ward, containing some fifteen beds, where I was the only patient. There he came twice daily to torture me with a powerful electric battery—the trouble having then become acute rheumatism from my waist to both knees—and with him a big Russian dresser to hold my hands whilst the battery was at work over the afflicted parts of my anatomy. When I flatly refused to suffer any more of this treatment, I was bound in “Scot’s dressing” from feet to waist. One morning the medico—a Britisher, I grieve to say—came to the bed-foot, leaned on it, talking to me; then he suddenly took hold of one foot and jerked it into the air. For a moment I thought my leg had been torn out at the socket; in the next my breakfast crockery had gone whizzing at his stubbly head. But the pain and my position rendered the aim uncertain. He ducked at each missile, and went away laughing; while I heaped on him many words which may not be written here. In the afternoon he came again, said that all I needed was exercise, and left his assistant to take off the dressing. On my first leaving the bed I knew not how to walk. I had forgotten how to put one foot before the other. The muscles of my legs would not answer the orders of the brain. To overcome this I made a ball with some of the bandages, and held it prisoner with another bandage while I sat on the bedside and tried to kick the ball. When I could crawl to the next bedstead, more bandages were used to make a continuous rail from bed-foot to bed-foot, so as to form a support up and down one side

of that long and lonesome ward—a lonesomeness that was relieved only by the dresser bringing my meals and now and then staying a little while to teach me Russian phrases in return for my correcting his English. Then the football came into use again, when I could totter about the middle of the ward without support. At last the day of my release arrived. I felt like the Prisoner of Chillon or the Man in the Iron Mask, going free. That kindly dresser—who had many a time shot withering looks of contempt at the medico, as the latter racked me with the battery—had lent me a stick, and I thought I should be able to get along the streets fairly well. On my way down the stairs I passed a mirror, but could not at first believe *that* to be my reflection. From a plump and healthy young fellow who had never previously known the pain of disease and hardly the pain of weariness, I had shrunk to a white-faced, hollow-cheeked, slim, bent-up cripple at whom the English nurse, who had tended me commiseratingly during those first nine days, stopped, stared, and failed to recognize. And that crawl to the Consul's office, where I made a complaint of the treatment given to me at the hospital—unheeded till I produced the R.N.R. certificate and insisted on my statements being taken down—how often I wondered if I should ever reach the place!

That night I was away, in a Leith steamer, for Millwall Dock—unable to walk from the following morning, and from there to the Thames was tended sympathetically by the almost motherly hands of Scots A.B.'s and a tall, thin stoker whose ministering services I shall never forget. They conveyed me down to Greenwich Hospital. There three months were passed in diminishing pain, reading whatever I could get from the library of the institution, and in writing verse-allegories and what was meant to be the libretto of an imaginative tragic opera; in all of which a young, fair-haired house-

physician took a pleasing interest. At the end of that time I voluntarily took my discharge, "somewhat improved," said the report, and returned to my friends at Grimsby. The remainder of that winter was spent in sitting in a padded chair by the fireside, making ships' models in Mr. Wright's workshop during fine weather, and in being generally helped to bed, dress, etc. In the end I became an inmate of the hospital there; then recovered sufficiently to go to sea again—now with an empty pocket, and that goal of my purpose apparently as far off as ever.

Back to the Baltic it was on this occasion, two voyages; then out to run a six months' charter between Marseilles and Alexandria. In those six months I saw more trouble between officers and men than had previously fallen within my experiences. Our master was the principal owner. Up to then he had been only in "windjammers"; steamboat ways were unknown to him; he was mean at heart, hence the initial friction began on that hoary sore point—the food. One instance will suffice: The Board of Trade's scale of provisions stated that on every other day each man should receive half-a-pound of flour; but nothing was said as to whether the meal was to be kneaded up and baked or boiled. Consequently, instead of the usual tiny loaf or dumpling, each of us regularly received the scale allowance of useless dry flour, and as regularly went to the side and threw it overboard—mostly to windward, so that it would be blown up and over the master and his toadying officers on the bridge. One after the other my shipmates were disrated, and fights between them and the officers were common on board—in port the latter would not leave the vessel after nightfall. Me they left alone—that Naval Reserve certificate was both a bar to their disrating me and the means of enforcing attention at the hands of a Consul. As a matter of fact, to end one

pandemonium of physical racket and injustice, whilst the vessel was lying in Alexandria harbour, I got into a boat alongside and went on board a British warship, where, with certificate in hand, I reported what was going on aboard our "tramp." The captain was sorry that he had no jurisdiction, short of mutiny—I must go to the authorities, said he. But we, "poor sailormen," had no authorities except our master and officers; the British were in occupation, thus robbing us of doubtful consular help and throwing us back on the more doubtful native police. In the end the captain sent one of his lieutenants with me—"not as a person in authority," but to see what was transpiring and to talk a little reason to the master, if need be. When we stepped aboard, the master had turned tail by going ashore. Yet the lieutenant was satisfied with what he saw, and the caution he gave to our chief-mate had a most salutary effect.

Naturally this made me a marked man; but, petty and contemptible though the efforts were to square matters with me, there was only one attempt to do me serious harm. This was one night, at the open wheel, when the second-mate made an abrupt, savage and unprovoked spring at me. He was a person of about my weight, some ten years older and half-broken up by a dissolute life; hence he not only made the initial mistake of partially hitting the wheel at his first ill-directed blow, but—when my watchmate sprang from the "fiddley" and took the wheel—he quickly cried off that short, sharp encounter which instantly took place between the wheel and the front of the bridge. Truth to tell, the devil was up at the accumulation of injustice; the second-mate was a particularly mean specimen of his kind, and for a few minutes I revelled in the battery. A year or two before this I would have picked him up bodily and thrown him, like a sack of rotten "shakings," over the

bridge-barrier on to the deck below, as I had done with a much bigger member of the *Algiitha's* crew. But rheumatism had played sad havoc with those muscles which had formerly possessed such exceptional staying-power; and, in addition, the nine months' illness had brought out a serious quietude of mind and manner, such as was only seen previously in rare times of depression. One unfortunate circumstance, subsequent to this affair, was my being accidentally shot in the upper part of the right leg during a fracas in a café off the Grand Square in Alexandria. The place was quite respectable; but a row suddenly sprang up not far from us, in which a Greek whipped out a small revolver and began to "pot" off in all the happy promiscuousness of a young boy with a new pop-gun. One of his bullets, after spending its velocity in breaking a chair-back, lodged in my leg, but did not reach the bone. A neighbouring medical man soon extracted the bit of lead. The master and officers did their best to make me go to the hospital and be discharged; they swore that I had brought on the quarrel and was therefore answerable for being incapacitated. After a talk with the doctor about the wound, I offered to take on the duty of night-watchman. That offer was accepted, in the hope that hobbling about would soon worsen the wound and so drive me to the hospital. Fortunately, the hole gave me very little trouble and quickly healed up. Another cause of friction was the master's refusal to "advance" us any money in harbour. (When the master of a merchant vessel pays his men money during the voyage it is termed an "advance," although the men's wages have then been due for months.) To counteract this we took to smuggling matches into Marseilles, and were successful enough to clear a few francs on each "run." What a stroke it would have been for the master and his officers if they had known of this! At the same time they were

carrying sulphuric and similar acids, to the extent of two hundred half-protected demijohns per passage, to Alexandria. But an accident in the Egyptian harbour put an end to that traffic, which, unknown to us at the time, was illegal both so far as we and the vessel's insurance were concerned. Finally, whilst we were unloading in Marseilles, I strained myself at work, told the mate immediately of the matter, was ignored, went to the master aft, was ordered "for'ard" like a dog with mange and threatened with "logging" and "jonty-arms" if I did not instantly resume work. My reply was a respectful request for a doctor, then a move to my bunk, where I remained till next day; when I went aboard a Hall Line boat that lay alongside, saw her doctor, and was advised to take the matter in my own hands—*i. e.* disobey the master's orders not to go ashore by repairing at once to the nearest doctor. Instead of doing so I followed his prescription till next morning, when I was arrested "for refusing duty" and was once more taken to that ancient fortified hill on the farther side of the old harbour. The upshot of it all was, after three days' incarceration, an appearance before the Consul, my case proved and complaints entered up officially—so far as I could ascertain, but not without the assistance of that Reserve certificate—and me, at my request, paid off. Thus much for what life was occasionally in an English steam "tramp" twenty years ago. More of the kind could be related here; but one "experience" of a sort is enough for this record.

Properly to describe my journey from Marseilles to the Humber would require another Sterne or a Samuel Butler. Having provided myself with a litre and a half of the commonest *vin ordinaire*, a cup and a bag of sandwiches—both because I wished to husband my means for the old purpose and because I had never been troubled with a desire for intoxicants—I was walking

about the platform when a young Scots stoker, half-drunk and none too clean, lumbered up and said: "Ye're a Britisher and ye're awa' through to Paris—eh?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Then ye'll na doot carry me money an' papers for me.—Ye see, A'am . . .; but I'll be aal reet in th' morn."

Briefly, I did as he requested, putting his half-capful of five-franc pieces into the unoccupied part of my money-belt, under my clothes, and his papers into a buttoned-up inner pocket, and giving him a sort of receipt for the whole. The train left at about two-thirty; all that afternoon and during most of the night he was a very devil of humorous, half-silly interference and trouble. In our compartment there were some *chasseurs*, wearing red trousers, and every now and then the Scotsman would doze off in his corner and put his dirty boots on their knees; till at last they made to throw him out of the window. Then I found that he had a flask of brandy and one of rum in his pockets; peace was made by him laughingly offering these to the soldiers. They drank, returned the bottles; I got possession of them and threw them away. Later on he awoke from a short sleep, hungry and thirsty. I was half-asleep, handed him my cup and told him to take some of the sandwiches and wine. When I awoke at dawn, wine and sandwiches were gone. It was well that I had supped heartily at midnight. In Paris I gave him his money and papers and refused to have anything more to do with him. Two days were spent in a look around the city. At nine-thirty on the following night I was at St. Lazare station, awaiting the departure of the train while talking to a young fellow whose acquaintance I had made on the previous evening. Immediately before the train started, along came two *gendarmes* with a man between them and

followed by a porter. My compartment was the only one with an open door; into it they pushed the man. The warning bell rang. I sprang in also. The door was locked, and I stood face-to-face with the Scots stoker—the *gendarmes* and the porter watching him safely away in the train. Shortly, he had been locked up; there the police saw, by his papers and Cook's coupon-tickets, who he was and whither bound, and had brought him to the train. On counting his money, he was only eighteen francs and some sous short of what I paid him on the previous day—which says much for Scots acumen, his luck, and the honesty of the Paris police. Again he was hungry and thirsty. I, who had laid in another litre of wine and the usual bag of bread and meat, was enjoying the beauty of the night at the carriage window. In pity I told him to help himself. He did so, this time leaving me one sandwich and half my small cup of wine. But there was no meanness in him, only hunger and thirst, then satisfaction, some shame and many thanks. I saw the humour of the matter and lit my pipe. From Newhaven we travelled in separate carriages. At noon, on London Bridge station, he came along and said he was going to the Sailors' Home in Well Street, E. That night as I was getting into a fast train from King's Cross to the north, and at the moment of departure, up came the Scotsman, blundered in behind me; the door was banged to; the train moved, and again we knew each other. At two-thirty next morning we parted, at Peterborough, for ever.

Having brought my Naval Reserve training up to date, I shipped, in a well-found steam "tramp," for Vera Cruz and other places in the Bay of Campeachy—thinking that four or five months more at sea would enable me to make that longed-for start ashore. From Vera Cruz we went into the bight of the bay, and were putting out railway plant off the mouth of a small

river, when there happened one of the most thrilling things I ever saw—in fact this is the only reason for including it here.

All one forenoon a thick heat-haze hung over the smooth, greasy face of those tropic waters. There might never have been a breath of wind in the whole heavens, the atmosphere was so oppressive. A heavy groundswell was rolling leisurely past where we lay at anchor in fourteen fathoms of water. Captain G—— said that we were “in for a duster,” and gave the chief-engineer orders to have steam up ready for instant use, for he thought we should probably have to put to sea before the day was over. On the previous evening a couple of shore-men had come off to spend a night aboard with the “old man,” at cards and whatever else they could find to amuse themselves. At 3 p.m. they were still aboard, on the poop, making revolver-practice at the black dorsal fins of sharks which floated lazily by, almost on the surface of the bay. Under that terrific haze we bubbled at every pore, our greatest exertion being complaints on the weather. It was like being in a measureless oven, moist with a peculiar vapour. In the holds below the Mexican half-breeds—certainly the most lazy cargo-workers I have ever met—lugged and swore, but swore more than they lugged. Captain G—— said the glass was falling rapidly. He repeated his orders to have everything in readiness for speedily getting underway. Suddenly there went up from the poop a shout that stopped every man within hearing of it. The cry came from one of our visitors and was to us enigmatical.

“A 'spout! A 'spout!” he cried excitedly.

He was pointing away ahead; in that direction all eyes were instantly turned. Those by his side on the poop saw what he meant. With them active excitement ruled. Amongst us, who could not see clear of the vessel's bows because of the midship erections, wonder

and curiosity were the principal emotions. From the fore-deck came a confusion of warning cries. At once, everywhere, there was wild hurrying to and fro. Faces blanched by fear were turned towards the fo'c'sle-head, over which peered many pairs of staring eyes. Every tongue had something to say at the same time; every man looked for a leader, yet at the same time obeyed his own impulse. Up from the holds, like rats from a burning well, came Mexicans, half-breeds, Yankees, and representatives of six or eight other nations. On the lighters around us fear and excitement ranged higher, for the men there were in greater danger owing to their craft being smaller than the steamer was. Officers and engineers shouted men to their posts. On to his bridge rushed our skipper, elderly and near-sighted as he was. At his heels ran one of the visitors; the other supported the master's fainting wife on the poop. Roused to action at last, some of us tore forward in the mate's wake to the work of getting up our anchor.

Now it was, from the fo'c'sle-head, that we came in full sight of the advancing terror. Apparently it had come into being within about a quarter of a mile of where we lay. In shape like a mighty funnel, with its spout thrust into an inverted one, it towered up from the surface of the water into that heavy bank of clouds and haze overhead. But it did not keep any definite shape for many minutes together. At times the narrow part sank inwards until we thought the fearsome thing would snap there; at others it swelled out till the 'spout was one sheer pillar of upright water; then it lessened off at the face of the bay, making us think that it was about to draw up altogether, only to spread out again and become somewhat bell-shaped. Another variant was caused by the narrow portion working up and down, being sometimes high as our main-truck, then low as a vessel's deck.

About the windlass we leaped and tumbled, doing the necessary work, Heaven alone knew how, yet doing it, and in frenzied haste. We might have been a prize gun-crew, drilling for the Navy's chief guerdon; but, instead, we were six dirty merchant-seamen, blinded by perspiration, working for our lives. Meantime, the mate reeled out orders like a tape-machine. From the bridge the "old man" shouted orders, which were drowned in the noisy rattle of the gipsy-chain that worked the exasperatingly slow windlass. It was only too obvious that the waterspout was making straight for us. The air thundered with its deluge; the water around its base was dented like a saucer. Clap, clap, clap fell those windlass-palls——Palls of death or palls of life, which were they to be? We could have seized the cable with our hands and almost torn it up. Captain G—— had begun to yell an order to unshackle and slip the cable. Abruptly the deafening whir of our gipsy-chain stopped—not an uncommon happening. There was a moment's dead silence.

"What's the matter?" roared the mate to the A.B. at the steam-winch, by the aid of which the anchor was being hove apeak. The man shouted back that he did not know what was wrong, trying his best to restart the winch. The mate swore. We stood around, numbed to inaction by the new phase of our position. The cargo-workers began to make tracks for their empty lighters, thinking to get away ashore and out of danger in one of them.

"Unshackle! Unshackle and slip it! Why the dickens don't you unshackle, Mr. Eyson?" yelled the "old man," running frantically from end to end of his upper bridge, and, every time he crossed it, uncereemoniously thrusting aside his guest, who would persist in getting in the way with advice to "shoot at the thing and burst it."

Added to the hubbub on deck the engines were blowing off steam as though their boilers would split. Instinctively some of us glanced at the waterspout. It was not more than two cables' length away!¹ Do its work the winch would not. Madly the mate, apparently oblivious of Captain G——'s shouts, leaped down from the fo'c'sle-head and ran to the winchman's side. Two of us followed, all seized with the one idea of restarting the winch, yet all impotent as babes. At last the "old man's" orders to slip the cable made an impression on the mate, who repeated the command to "Chips." Another rush was made forward and up the ladders. Feverishly and wildly we laboured at the task of securing the fore-part of the cable, so as to slacken up the after-part for the purpose of unshackling. Eyes smarting with sweat and mouths almost parched, jammed fingers and accidental blows were all alike unheeded. As seamen readers will probably surmise, the pin was rusted in its shackle. This occasioned delay, and before the task showed any signs of finish there came a newer and more alarming phase of the matter.

Suddenly that terrorizing pillar of water stopped its slow progress and began a quick march towards us. Straight on it came, so fast that it was easily seen to be moving over the surface. Not a point did it deviate. The thunder of its impact on the water became deafening. Surely landmen never saw a scene like to that in its awful simplicity, sublimity, and threatening tragedy. A smooth bay marked only by a heavy ground-swell, a thick haze of suffocating heat, a dense bank of unbroken cloud, and a mighty pillar of rushing, swirling water stalking directly at us. We stood dumbfounded before the terrible spectacle. Not a prayer, not a sound, not a movement came from any one of the sixty-odd souls who gazed at that oncoming avalanche of water. Even one's

¹ Five hundred and six yards.

thinking powers seemed to be paralyzed for the moment. It was the instant of dead silence and inaction that usually precedes the mad panic consequent to such fearful occasions. A second more and every man on board had turned on his heel and dashed for what seemed to him to be safety. Each for himself and Heaven for us all, that was the keynote of the situation. The sole idea with most of us was how and where to get away from the awful thing that menaced us. The result was a pell-mell rush aft. No prize-racer on ancient or modern ground covered his course at the rate we went from fo'c'sle-head to poop. Almost before we had fully realized what we were doing, we stood in a mass on the poop-deck—officers, seamen, cargo-workers and foremen. Such of the lightermen who had made for their craft were busily casting the vessels adrift, thoroughly assured in their own minds that the 'spout was about to march diagonally over the steamer's bow.

Up from the stokehold and the engine-room, in a mad haste of inquiry at the stampede we had just made along the decks, came stokers and engineers. Seeing us gathered there on the poop was enough for them. Like grains of steel to a powerful magnet they sprang to join us. It was at this juncture that one common idea seemed to strike the crowd—*i. e.* in running from danger to fancied safety we had but put some three hundred feet between us and destruction. As one man we leapt to repair the evil, our single thought being the lighters! There had previously been two of those craft on our port side, empty; but their crews had made off with them at the first signs of danger. This caused a mad general rush at the three remaining ones to starboard, yet fate had not willed that we should so escape. At the moment of our second stampede the 'spout had been, so far as we could then see, within a few fathoms of the vessel's bow. When we reached her side to leap into the lighters

we saw that our terrible enemy had swerved from its course just enough to clear the ship, but had not abated its speed perceptibly.

On it came, and there we stood. Fright is reputed to have turned men grey in a single night. That scene, added to the nearness of the waterspout, was almost enough to blanch the face of a negro. Move we apparently could not. Like the inevitable march of some omnipotent demon of destruction the waterspout came on. The foremost lighter, half-filled with cargo, went down as though it were a matchbox under a bucketful of water poured from an altitude of a dozen feet. Then the 'spout paused, as if considering the advisability of destroying another barge.

That was the moment of our deliverance from the spell which had held us in its subtle and resolute grasp. Back from the rail we fled—some to the opposite side of the deck, others on to the bridge, some forward, and some aft—anywhere, everywhere, wherever we could get away from that devastating fall. A panic was on us, but only for a moment. Captain G—— and the mate rapidly recovered their senses, and as quickly resumed command over the crowd—I write “crowd” because the cargo-workers’ actions showed that, in all things appertaining to an escape, they were now one with us. Whatever order was issued, they sprang to obey it as though part and parcel of our crew. As we had done before, so we did again—tackled the slipping of our cable. Surely never previously was a shackle-pin so stubborn. Budge it would not. Again came shouted queries from Captain G—— to Mr. Eyson as to why we could not get the pin out, and whether or not we ever should. These but served to muddle him and flurry us. As a result the mate took the mall and bolt from “Chips,” made an attempt himself on the immovable shackle, failed to strike straight, and smashed his thumb with the blow. Back

to the work sprang "Chips," whilst one of the men tore off the mate's shirt-sleeve and roughly bandaged up the damaged hand. Then came an A.B. with some paraffin to loosen the pin of the shackle.

During this operation—as I afterwards learnt from some who more closely watched the danger—the 'spout sheered off a little way. Then it returned, struck the second lighter, and sent it head-first to the bottom of the bay. With the third and final lighter it played—yes, seemed to play! No other word would so accurately describe the manner in which the column moved about the craft—now taking its very stem into the downpour, yet not putting more than a few bucketfuls inside; now wandering along by its gunwale, passing it by, then returning. Finally it moved off a few fathoms, made a small circle, hurried back, and filled the lighter in an instant. That was one of our moments of greatest excitement. Meanwhile, the engines were now going, a man was at the wheel, and Captain G— was manoeuvring his vessel to cheat the 'spout. Down went the lighter. The 'spout was following our vessel as she moved sideways; its edge was within a fathom of the starboard rail. All work except the handling of the steamer was abruptly ended. It would have been something superhuman to continue in the face of that horror, and we were but men, although men who had, in one form or another, faced death more times than we owned fingers. Every instant was an age—an age of expectancy and horror. Generally, we appeared to think of nothing but that rushing power of water. The skipper gave a splendid example of heroism. He stood at the port end of his upper-bridge, his back against the railing, on which his hands rested, awaiting practically certain death as though it were but a morning cup of coffee being brought him by the steward. It was the personification of duty in the face of death.

Then the 'spout took an upward turn. In place of the deafening thud of its waters on the bay, there was a tremendous whizzing noise as it whirled on high. Our vessel's previous slight cant to starboard, occasioned by the 'spout's impact, was reversed. She listed to port, drawn over by its upward attraction and the inverted cup-shaped mound it made on the water's face. With this our expectation of calamity altered only in form. Instead of looking for the 'spout to wreck us by passing over the vessel, we thought it would break and fall, sinking the ship as it came down. For it had suddenly narrowed about ten feet above the bridge until it was no thicker than a man's middle. Part of what we expected immediately came about. The 'spout broke off and went up, up out of sight.

In a moment the scene was as if no waterspout had been. Only the missing lighters and our own haggard faces spoke of its late presence. Like men suddenly and strangely aroused from a long, deep sleep we turned and looked at each other. Could it be that we had really escaped? Had so dreadful a visitant been close to us so lately, yet gone away without destroying us? These were the questions our faces asked, but no tongue uttered a word. Maybe every heart was too deeply engaged in giving thanks for that unexpected deliverance. Perhaps the sensation of the moment was merely one of wonderment, coupled with pardonable doubt as to whether or not all of us were, or had been, dreaming. But whatever the feeling was we were not long left in possession of it.

As the crack of a whip came wind that brought us sharply to our bearings. It was a squall alongshore from the direction whence the waterspout had come, and it quickly showed us that the steamer was dragging her anchor. This was a new danger, as the bay curved across our stern, but it was a danger to which we were

accustomed. It gave us all fresh energy, fresh possession of our senses, fresh life. We sprang to work with a cheerfulness that made toil light. The "old man" rang his engine-room telegraph, "Half-speed ahead." "Give her some chain, Mr. Eyson!" he roared. "Run out to the forty-five fathom shackle! Quick now! She's dragging!"

And quick it was. On to the fo'c'sle-head we leaped again, and out ran our cable, after a plug had been hurriedly replaced in the assaulted shackle-pin. How glorious it was to see the windlass-gipsy flying round, to hear the deafening rattle of the cable drowning the whistling wind! Out of the maw of what had appeared to be inevitable and speedy death into one of the commonplaces of our normal existence, and all so rapidly that there was barely time to realize what had taken place! Now the vessel forged ahead almost imperceptibly, yet enough to allow her anchor to resettle itself in the bottom of the bay. Then the engines were stopped. She drifted astern, and we were thankful to see that she did not drag. The anchor had taken new hold, and we were spared the work of finding a new anchorage. With a general feeling of relief all hands turned from the windlass, to be startled by the cry, from several pairs of lips—

"There it is again!"

And there was the waterspout, all too truly, away on our port beam. Scarcely, however, had the warning shout been uttered when it again disappeared. Almost at that instant the wind dropped, and rain came down as only in the tropics it can, but not for more than ten minutes. Then all was still. The heat-haze had gone; the ground-swell had subsided; the air was clear; and we lay in a scene of peace. The whole strange occurrence had not occupied more than half-an-hour; but during that period we seemed to have lived a lifetime.

When it was all over, I felt as if that misty hand from the cellar had been near me again.

The return trip took us to New Orleans, Philadelphia, and across the Atlantic in winter; whereby I was again laid up, and received one of the greatest though most harmless shocks I had known. We were crossing the Banks, going bow into a bitter north-easter and a nasty swell. The night was black with fog and lack of moon. I was hurrying forward when the vessel gave that warning dither which is so well-known to seamen. Instantly my arms went around a tall, narrow "feeder"-hatch, back-on to the expected rush of water, and braced up for a gasping, icy bath, even if no worse. Then it came, half-smothering me for a moment, but lukewarm! I had forgotten that we were in the Gulf Stream. The other, my former enemy, came on slowly; till when we arrived in Cardiff, after discharging at Cork, there was only one course open to me—another hospital.

CHAPTER XI

New friends—A happy voyage—Eighteen months' illness—A cripple seeking work—Wormwood and hunger—Tallying timber—A lawyer's clerk—An evening student—"To My Last Florin"—Another dream—An insurance agent—Contributing to newspapers—A dream fulfilled—Publishing "The Mermaid"—An "experience"—A record of narrowness—"Log-rolling" and vinegar—Meeting Irving—Invited to the Lyceum—A verse farewell.

My refuge on this occasion was the *Hamadryad*, the hulk of an old second-rater that was used as a hospital on the mud-flats outside the entrance to Cardiff docks. There some three months were spent, with my knees and feet fast in chronic rheumatism; and there I had the good fortune to make new friends who were to have considerable influence on my later life. Amongst these were Mr. and Mrs. Owen Phillips, he being the assistant to the medical superintendent of the hospital; Mr. Donald Maclean, a young solicitor who was just beginning to practise and is now M.P. for Peebles; and Miss Tilly, who regularly visited the old craft for missionary purposes. Unknown to me and practically unheeded—for I had almost ceased to care what the future held for me—this was to be a great turning-point in my small affairs. Having noticed that I did much writing, whilst lying there, unable to put my feet to the ground, Mr. Phillips paused, one day about a week after my admittance, and genially said, "You seem to waste a lot of ink and paper." He then came to the bedside, sat down, and we talked. Presently he asked what I was scribbling at the time. I showed it to him—a piece of verse on the hulk, beginning—

Thou relic of an age, alas ! outgrown,
Reminder of the crumbling dead,
Ne'er thought thy makers, nor have liked to own,
Where stood a gun would stand a bed.

From that day he was a great-hearted, practical friend to whose virtues as such I cannot do justice here. A classical scholar with a wide range of modern languages, a fine critic who possessed a large knowledge of literature, one by whose side Nature might have stood and said: Here's a model man, than whom I have seldom made a better. From the very first he stood to me in the light of tutor, guide, friend, comrade-in-arms, against our "destinies severe." He listened to all my hopes and purposes, read and criticized those allegories, etc., flatly negatived my idea of entering somewhere for a university finish, and briefly said: "Every cobbler to the last that Nature has made him, when he finds it—take you to your tablets." One day, later on, he put into my hands a piece of paper, saying, "Here's a sort of motto and standard for you; keep it before you, but don't be cast down because you can't attain to it altogether. It's a quotation from a classic author, and when you find out who he was you can tell me." That paper contained the following: "It is a difficult task to give newness to old things, authority to new things, beauty to things out of use, fame to the obscure, favour to the hateful, credit to the doubtful, nature to all and all to nature. To such, nevertheless, as cannot attain to all these, it is greatly commendable and magnificent to have attempted the same."¹

To go before my story, three years later that motto, together with Balzac's "Time is the capital of men who have but their intellect for fortune," was put over my little work-table in Cardiff. However, there is no dogmatist like a young one, and I was still unconvinced. I

¹ From the Preface to Pliny's *Natural History*, addressed to the Emperor Vespasian.

had read that the magic letters B.A. and M.A. were an Open Sesame to London journalism, and that was my intermediate objective. So I told Miss Tilly that I wanted work ashore, in order that I might join some of the classes at the University College.

"What for?" she asked.

"Education," said I.

"Education? Nothing of the sort. In a way, you have read too much as it is. Go to life or nature and express yourself. You don't want anything more now."

"Yes, I do;" and I showed her where I had written in the "Journal," I am like Archimedes: I would move the world if I could but find a fulcrum whereon to rest my lever."

"But you have both fulcrum and lever; they only want practice," she objected.

"No," I said; "the fulcrum I want is more education in men and things and the like; the lever of expression must be strengthened by education, and the world I want to move is the heart of humanity—others can move its head if they wish to." And there we stuck. That was the land of my hopes and inclinations. But, somehow, between it and me there seemed to roll a sea whereof I had neither chart nor book of sailing directions, neither pilot nor bearings, and was apparently even without a compass. The Avalon isle of my desires appeared to be farther away than ever, and those illnesses were sapping all the old self-reliance. My Morgana, erstwhile and still so young and beautiful, so visionary and so distant, was to grow older and coarser ere I met her—was to pass from being a nymph-like queen of dreamland into a practical woman dealing with the grim necessities of life. It takes some dreamers nigh a lifetime to become practitioners, to learn the open lessons of hard existence; then they awake to find the remaining years all too short for them to put half their dreams into practice. So, in a way, it was with me, till

more years had gone by and the lean-jawed hound of want came along, took simplicity by the neck and left it dead.

On the other hand, Maclean (who came, at Miss Tilly's request, to enliven my hours in bed) heard my purpose, and cast about him to find a help to the end in view. But he, like my friend aboard, was a stranger in the town; so that his efforts were in vain—as all mine were, when I left the hospital to hobble about by the aid of a stick, spending my few savings whilst seeking employment, and slowly recovering till I was well enough to put in my Reserve training, then go to sea again.

That voyage was in the *Buccleuch*, a 2,000-ton sailing ship, out to Cape Town, where six of us "got ourselves into the papers" by climbing Table Mountain while a thick "cloth" hung over it; thence to Calcutta—where I spent a fortnight in the hospital, in consequence of an attack of heat-fever—and back to Dundee. It was one of the happiest voyages I ever made, and the second on which I saw the old-time custom of heaving the "dead horse" out of the fo'c'sle, when the month's advance pay had been worked out; in addition to which Neptune came aboard when we crossed the "line." For books—an empty pocket had reduced me to a copy of Dick's "Shakespeare," given to me by Miss Tilly, Brewer's "Phrase and Fable," and a Bible from one of the Wright family. In themselves they were more than enough; but in addition I was blessed with two of the best chums that a man ever had. We were all young; our tastes were much the same; and one of them, the son of a Swedish surgeon, had a fiddle, which he could play well. So it came about that our dog-watches were full of melody and good-fellowship generally. As a proof that all men before the mast do not spend their leisure time in yarning, smoking, cards, and mending and washing clothes, one of our pastimes consisted of Östrom putting down old Swedish airs, to which I

wrote English words, and Cairns sang the songs at our evening concerts under the topgallant-fo'c'sle-head ; one of them being the following—

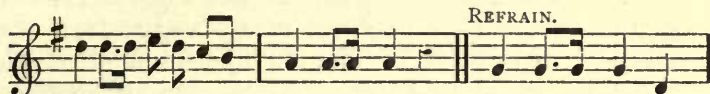
Con spirito.



Raise high the gob-let, Down care and leave us ; Let flow the spark - ling,



ruby - tinted wine ; Raise high the gob - let, Drink, sons of Bac-chus



Pour out the gen-er-ous juice of the vine. Come, ye with pain, come ;



Come, sons of fame, come ; Deep in each breast let fellow-ship abound ;



Care do not bor - row, Yield not to sor - row, Drain out the cup, and



toast the world a - round.

Hearts filled with sadness, hopes early blighted,
Up to your lips, come, lift the flowing bowl ;
Wine brings us gladness, though coldly slighted,
Let then its praise resound—ay, let it roll.

Drink to the Muses, drink to Minerva,
Drink now to Genius no matter where its birth ;
And he who refuses pledge him in *aqua*,
Fit but for souls that cling to sordid earth !

Gaze in the bowl, boys,—deep in the red wine,
Robed in fair beauty, lies the face we love,
Soon will the bright loys, turning the earth, shine
In our last home, when's sped the soul above.

At the end of that voyage, now in excellent health again, we three went to Grimsby, and spent a couple of weeks in homely joys. Then Östrom returned home to pass for a master's certificate, and Cairns and I shipped for the Black Sea—my purpose being to add a few months' pay to the money from the other voyage, then remain ashore and start for the distant goal. But it was the old story over again. A dirty passage all the way out to Malta, a leaky fo'c'sle, and I was left at Constantinople on the way up, once more in the grip of my old enemy. My last leaving that fair-looking city was as a crippled, Consul's passenger—at eighteenpence a day, paid out of my wages from the "tramp"! How different from the joyous state in which I had left it on the previous occasion! On a Christmas Eve—a time that was to be so remarkable in a similar way—sloppy with half-melted snow and bitter with an easterly wind, I, full of pain at every movement, and hardly caring whether I dropped by the way or not, took train for Grimsby; there to find a protracted asylum with the Wrights, and to be long looked on as one whose life lay all behind him. Their kindnesses to me cannot be repaid in this world. Yet, such is the perversity of human nature, how often I felt as much alone in the world as I was helpless; and how often I wrote in my "Journal," as had been written during the other illnesses, "Would to Heaven that Mary had lived!" During a whole year every known and many an unknown "cure" was tried, all to no good. Almost nightly I was carried up-stairs, to be carried down again next day. The use of my right arm was well-nigh gone, and it appeared to be only skin and bone. Friends said it was withering away; a few thought I had been "cursed by some witch abroad." During four nights and days a watch was kept, in the constant expectation that each consecutive hour would be the last. Rheumatism had

got near my heart. But the crisis passed, and again there was that sense of the protecting hand. Summer came, and I crawled about by the aid of a crutch and a stick. Winter followed, and I sat by the fireside, nigh helpless again, hopeless—a young man with perhaps two-thirds of the allotted span before him, and apparently past the reach of medical science to make life bearable. I again read Dante, and went farther than he did in the hell of despair, writing such things as—

Thou hast no place in Hell, Heav'n wants thee not ;
'Tis only Earth that needs thy service, Sleep,—
Thou death in life, death limited tho' deep ;
O blessed state wherein Care is forgot !

This life alone—these pains thy hands out-blot,
Can never spare thee, friend of those who weep :
O breathing death, thou dost all woe o'er-creep,
And quieten life's for ever baffling plot !

Come, then, and seal these pain-fraught eyes of mine,—
Ay, close them though they never open more ;
These tortured nerves, this dragging heart, entwine,
And lead me hence to Lethe's wished-for shore :
Oh, bring thy spirit-liquor !—rest divine—
And soak me through as if with hellebore.

Yet intermingled with it all there was, as there had been during the two previous periods of helplessness and racking pain, a certain buoying-up due to a private interpretation of that "flying" dream. At these times the feeling was that I should pull through, that some day my ship would surely come home. When a slight use of the right arm was recovered, I tried my 'prentice hand at writing for payment ; but wherever poem, story or essay went *they* came home. Then a retired chemist put me on my feet again, mainly by the use of an *onion-diet*. After eighteen months of helplessness and pain I once more went to sea, this time as steward of a small coasting steamer, because my physical condition would not allow me to do manual work. It was during that

summer when I chanced to be present at a Breton wedding and was curiously reminded of the wake at Normanton.

Six months passed away. Again I was out of monetary debt, and was in Cardiff, with three pounds odd in my pocket and the enemy back upon me. Another spell in the *Hamadryad*, and the fact was all too patent that as a means of earning a living the sea had closed her gates against me. Once more the old friends there lent aid to the end of my getting employment, which would have to be indoors, light, warm and dry. But who wanted, or would give clerical work to, a "common" sailor?—to one who knew only how to pull on ropes, swear, walk ungainly, and smoke foul tobacco! Charity can go far at times; mercy can go farther on occasions; but to expect so great a stretch in business offices was to argue one's self as being far too simple-minded for practical life. All the time poems and articles (many of which have subsequently been published in leading journals) were going out regularly, and coming back as persistently. It seemed as if all my circumstances were in league to drive me farther into the gutter, deeper into the inferno of gall and depression—or was it that the "destiny which shapes our ends" was hewing mine, very roughly to my mind, to things of finer issue than sitting on a high stool in a colliery-owner's office? What wonder that I found a bitter delight in turning again to "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers," till I became saturated with the spirit in which Byron must have written his satire; to a second-hand volume—bought at the price of a humble meal in a time of hunger—of mighty fulminations by forgotten great-littles against early work which is now in the world's gallery of immortal things, and to the recorded vicissitudes of poverty-hampered intellect, such as in the lives of Camoens, Clare, Burns, Bloomfield, etc. Not

one of the called, much less one of the chosen, I had lived so long in their company that I sat in the background and applauded; as a humble worshipper might have done from his obscure corner when the gentle Will, Ben Jonson, and all the other giants of their day were gathered at the Mermaid Tavern, flinging marvels of thought and expression at each other, as the commonplace mouth their platitudes. This was my Balm of Gilead, the while I limped about, hungry, writing sonnets and more allegories—all to be published by-and-by—wondering what the end would be; sometimes asking if there was a God above it all; seeing the empty-headed and the purse-proud go by in fine raiment, as I hugged the wall in my hobbling misery and oppressive loneliness; now ready, in mind, to help in bombarding streets and pulling down law and order; penning lyrics lashed with venom at circumstances, heavier verses on deeper subjects and with little less gall in them, and such as the following on the unschooled bard—

Though his work bears the stamp of the gods
He may sing!—he may starve, until hence
He is under the sods.
Tempted to seek the green bowers,
And by nature unfitted for trade,—
Priest of the Muses and flowers,
His sky-over-arched temple a glade;
While his choristers, rich with sweet powers,
Are the birds in the leaf's kindly shade,
From the dawn to the moon's pale hours.
Poor muser and dreamer at best,
How little his life hath of rest!
Damned with ethereal thoughts
That up-send his lone soul to the stars!
Whether or no he may wish
To be borne in his airy-wrought cars;—
To be winged and be wafted away,
To the gates of the great golden bars
Where the white angels pray.
Gifted? Ah, no! He is blasted!
In his temperament he is curst—
Laughed at by fools, and dismasted
In the midst of east winds from the purst

Ay, and when he has thirsted and fasted,
And has toiled—while misfortune him nurst—
He may die ere his pain's outlasted ;
May die with a song on his tongue,
Or wormwood at callous hearts flung.
Curst with the gifts which the gods,
In their wrath, have inflicted on him,—
Gifts they will never take back,
Though his sensitive soul it should swim
In the throes of a world of fierce care ;
And his faith flicker down until dim
In his crushed heart's despair.

Ah, well ! it is not given to us all to be able to see the true perspective of occurrences as they happen, particularly when those affairs are our own, and the times are full of stress and pain. So I continued to hobble about with a stick ; and, at the bitter end of things, to obtain some casual work in tallying timber on the dock-side at sixteen shillings per week. It was there, between the hauling-out of an empty lighter and the hauling-in of a full one, whilst the men shouted and swore, or loudly discussed the latest reported murder, that "The Mermaid" was written—to receive, two years later, in the June of 1897, high praise by some of the most critical journals in the country. One day the chief clerk came along, during a pause in the work, and picked up my MS., under the impression that it was the timber-tally. I stood a little way off, ignorant of his reading my poem, till I turned about, saw his error, and gave him the tally. After that he always looked at me in some such silence and wonderment as he probably would have if he had seen the "missing link" in humanity.

When this work gave out and it seemed to be impossible to obtain any other, my friend Maclean succeeded in finding another post for his boy-clerk, by which means he installed me as his office-boy and chief clerk in one. Now was I, indeed, a veritable member of respectable society ! In spite of my caligraphy being far from the round and flowing order, and of my painful feet—it was

long after this ere I could discard the stick and walk without limping—lo, I, pale, ruined in health and bent up, had jumped from vagabondage on the dock-side to a high stool in a lawyer's office! Ye gods, I could even peep to recognition in the humdrum haunts of the prosaic! For a little while I had been a sort of private tutor, with a pupil who would learn nothing except the use of foils and single-stick, and how to make and manipulate mechanical ghosts to frighten the servants, and whose mother encouraged him along his tumultuous way; but this elevation in the public eye!—How I sat on that tall stool, “like patience on a monument smiling at grief”!

My wages were small, for Maclean was new in practice and scanty o' siller. But what mattered that? I worked for a friend—worked? There was so little to do that much of my time went in reading law-books; in going up the hills to serve writs and County Court summonses, and sitting on gates, kicking impatiently at the bars below, thinking of the time when I sat on a gate as a “clapper-boy” at threepence a day, or writing lyrics and sonnets, while waiting to pounce on the objects of those blue, white or reddish documents in my pockets. What if I had no books, and each week-end saw me with one shilling to spare beyond my landlady's fixed weekly bill! Was there not the Free Library, where I found old friends and new ones, including Mr. John Ballinger, the librarian? For nigh upon a whole year this even tenor held its way, and almost every evening went in the public library—as did some thousands of other hours during my three years odd in Cardiff—where I went through three ordered stages of reading, Greek, Celtic and Teutonic, not, I grieve to say, in their originals. Yet out of it all there came some grasp of the Greek idea of beauty, unity and harmony; their wonderful sanity in religion and attitude towards the Godhead; the

simple sincerity of their refinement and clear reason, and their efforts at the highest of human attainment; and along with it the fire, mysticism and seeking, the scarcely hidden tears, and that sense of mist and far-off, unutterable things which mark the Celtic from all other schools of expressed thought; finally the heavy, doubting, seeking, destructive and constructive, flail-like reasoning of the German intellect, which left me cold. To me the most interesting things in the whole Teutonic range, outside Goethe and Schiller—whose “Robbers” I had played on my table-theatre in youth—were the Rhine legends and the old mythology, the whole story of which, together with its Norse variations, I practically committed to memory. My dream then was to follow the first in beauty, unity and sanity, but to blend it all with Celtic fire and feeling. Well, it were better that the goose should sometimes lift its head towards the singing lark than always to keep its beak to the ground; and no human being was ever the worse for adopting unattainable ideals. Further reading led me into early Saxon matters, out of which came a blank-verse tragedy, based on love, life in the seventh century, and a struggle between Christianity and the heathenism of that day in England. Another long spell (in this matter I am now beyond the other affairs of my story) went in Druidism, Celtic mythology, and the like, out of which there came another drama, and a romance whereof a certain publisher said, “It too seriously challenges comparison with Scott.” On the contrary, it is as unlike that inimitable master’s work as “Fishers of the Sea” differs from “Pêcheurs d’Islande,” with which critics have compared my poor book so often and so kindly. Forgetting one weighty remark of Miss Tilly’s—whether a quotation or no I know not—“Don’t pursue genius; let it pursue you,” and certainly not looking on myself, either then or now, as anything of the sort, I flew my untrained falcon at the highest game. Why, and at such a time, with so

much personal past to draw on, and when the same hours spent in dressing the obvious in smart-looking platitudes would have brought in some needed guineas? Because, firstly, my wants were so few that I was passing rich on less than forty pounds a year, and so could beat even Goldsmith's country parson; and, secondly, because I did what it was in me to do at the time, nor looked beyond the completion of what was in hand. And that same rule of conduct comes back to govern things now and then, or I should not have already spent ten years at a certain allegory which is now nearing its climax.

At that time books were more to me than my fellows were. But a change was coming. A client of Maclean's offered me largely increased wages to learn to manage a small grocer's shop in a back street in one of the suburbs. Clothes were becoming a subject of serious contemplation; the hours were not too late, except on Saturday nights; the work was easy during most of the day; so, after discussing the matter with Maclean (who had so often stood to me as a friend indeed), I took the offer. The owner had been medically ordered an outdoor life, had secured the post of traveller for a tea-house, and, after the first week's tuition, he was to leave me in charge, but to lend a hand at the tail-end of each week. Matters went swimmingly for six weeks; then he quarrelled with the tea-dealers, returned to his shop, and a fortnight later I was an "out-o'-work." Another spell of sending out literary efforts that came back incontinently, another accumulation of bitterness, another hugging the wall in hunger—three whole days being the longest spell in that—and Ishmaelite drifting, another sojourn in a mental hell; for the sea was still closed to me, owing to slight returns of rheumatism now and then. And still adversity could not turn me from the lute of poetry to the trombone of actual life. Why? Because, in the business man's mind, I was too much of a fool; and quite properly so—from his point of view.

I was another instance of the silly-wise. Willy-nilly my poor boat had been hitched to a star, and all the wild seas of seeming failure could not break it adrift. There I was meandering off the beaten path of men; appearing by mere chance to box the compass of my life's affairs; moonbound upon the hill-side of life, with the chasm of hell at my feet; tolerated and complacently smiled on by the coldly-wise grubbers, who could no more understand a wanton sadness or an apparently causeless merriment than they could have coined wonders in poetical epigrams; a sort of privateer on the humdrum waters of life, yet seemingly feckless; hard-bent for a certain goal, the road to which appeared to have been forgotten or was never known, but going there fiercely all the same,—then insensibly to stop, admiring a stream or a flowered-woodland, and writing a lyric or an elegy as if it were the only thing to do in the world; seeming to be mad by wanting that which the generality of those about me thought to be not worth the getting; harmless, useless; eating my aloes in secrecy; being incensed because others could see no laughs in the "Breitmann" ballads; putting forward Emerson's "Apology" as an excuse for dallying on the wayside, when the journey was urgent and the whole of it still to make: such, to all appearances, was I to those amongst whom I sought work. And—— Shall I state what they were to me? "Ah!" cries Mercy, "let me just peep in here." Possibly we were all right in our separate ways. Perhaps those coldly-wise persons had heard of a certain phrase in the west of Scotland, and acted according to it: "There are the wise folk, and the daft folk, and the Pattersons."

Still, it was all carried along in secret, except when I chanced to call on the Phillipses, to find an hour or two of rest, cheer and comfort in that wonderfully contrived little sitting-room of theirs on the port side of the waist, which Mrs. Phillips (who had caused my first appear-

ance in print, as a versifier) had so finely and naturally decorated with painted ferns and woodland flowers. Then some of it all was drawn out, and censure followed for my not going more often. It was on one of those occasions that Mrs. Phillips, as usual, asked "if the muses had been at work of late." My reply, while talking to her husband, was to hand her the note-book (which I continually carried for the purpose of sudden attacks of rhyme, etc.) heedless of what had latterly been added to the book. That evening, whilst I sat in Roath Park, eaten up with bitterness and ideas of a bloody revolution in matters literary, out came the book—to find an envelope containing money and lying on a page that bore the following "Lines to My Last Florin"—

Still all my snares, however finely set,
 Ye manage to elude and keep me poor,
 O bright highway to Hell!
 Mayhap I worship not enough; and yet
 I beat, both day and night, your brazen door,
 My health and work to sell!

I do not ask a plenty of your kind—
 You captain-general of the Devil's crew!
 I have no wish for wealth.
 My wants are few, and simple to my mind;
 I would not let your power my soul imbue,
 In open or in stealth.

I am a poor disciple? Ay, no doubt;
 I cannot sell my self-regard for ye,
 O fair Damnation's friend!
 Though I have starved—my light well-nigh put out—
 I could not hail ye first of gods, tho' free
 My soul were mine to lend.

Nor will I ever love you as do some;
 Tho' hunger greets me with each setting sun,
 I'll spite ye to your face!
 Tho' Want's relentless avalanches come,
 I'll ye defy, until I have out-run,
 This ill-conditioned race.

At the risk of being thought to have been a self-portentous dreamer, I will add that one night at this time I fell asleep, with a hazy idea of a wonderfully fine

song that was to stir the human heart "like sounds of martial music." A couple of hours later I awoke, with wet eyelids, from a dream in which a little, unheeded song of mine had gone floating up towards a dark and lowering welkin; where suddenly there was a break, through which the sunlight poured, and beautiful spirit-like hands were put forth and lifted the song into that glory above. There and then I arose, got a light, and wrote—

The sweetest song these lips e'er sang
Was sung to mine own self in sleep;
So through this heart's dead vaults it rang,
That Memory bow'd her head to weep.

I know not whence or how it came;
It went and left but this refrain:
"A noble life's the greatest fame,
And no renown is free from pain."

Awake—I found these eyes in tears,
My song ascending to the skies,
Its lines—the blood and toil of years,
Their dust-strewn hopes, their crushing fears,
Which come hard souls to humanize
And lift the gaze of earthward eyes.

Then another long break came in the horror. I managed to secure an insurance agency. By this means and four days' work a week my little wants were again supplied. Reading was continued at the Free Library, and much writing was done. I began to contribute articles, stories and verse to the big South Wales daily papers, and actually had shillings to spare at times, which went in absorbing hunts in old bookshops for first editions and the accumulation of a treasured shelfful. Now it was that, at the very threshold of the life literary, it appealed to me as an occupation with a halo about it, as something not to be associated with gross coins, but to be approached with "bated breath and whispering humbleness." To my simple mind it was the duty of the State to support the literary worker,

when once he had proved his quality; not as payment for his work, but because Nature, in making him a necessity to the well-being of the State, had rendered him unfit to compete successfully in the cut-throat *Alsatia* of Commerce. Again there was a time of sending work to London publishers and journals; again it all came back. Again I recollected that long, hard climb up the smooth silver birch for a wood-pigeon's nest which proved to be a sparrow's; and again I would have gloried in riding a wild horse through and through the ragtag and bobtail-minded mob of pandom. Then came my first literary commission. This was to complete, at once, a serial story of humble life, two-thirds of which had been submitted along with a summary of the remainder. The order came at noon on a Saturday. I worked till eight o'clock that night, walked for two hours, had supper, wrote until five a.m., then slept till nine. A bath, another long walk, work from two in the afternoon till nine p.m., then supper, to resume work immediately afterwards, and to rise from it at six o'clock next morning—the story finished. When that portion was taken to the editor, he regretted that the two-thirds on which he had accepted the thing were not of the same quality as it was—so did I. About this time I tore out of the volumes of my "Journal" such pages as I wished to retain, made a burnt-offering of all that remained, then stood free of the cramping atmosphere of early effort—except for a small exercise-book of verse which a young schoolmaster-room-mate begged as a mark of friendship. Would that it had also gone in the holocaust. Soon after this I made the acquaintance of two who were destined to be friends for a number of years. E—— was a young Welsh poet whose modest booklet had been warmly praised by journals which were too far inside the charmed circle for me to reach at that time. K—— was an embryo novelist who has published

excellent work since then. Both were younger than I, but their knowledge of the world was much better than mine. And what a trio we were of mutual admiration, mutual criticism that was both constructive and destructive! At times we fought verbally like champions who have come to loggerheads in their mutual cause; yet three happier or more kindred souls never sat and smoked, or strolled together under the stars, the while they talked of literature with all the enthusiasm of devotees.

To turn briefly to a less joyous affair, it was somewhat prior to this that I made the acquaintance of one who was at once recognized as the faceless person with whom I had dreamt of standing at the altar. There was no gainsaying the figure, a most unusual one; every detail was there. Then I remembered having, by the way of allegory, interpreted a remarkable dream of Öhlson's without knowing at the time that my parallel was an interpretation. So it was that caution led to a discovery which saved me from what would have been a worse disaster than any I had so far known. Then came the loss of the insurance agency. "New business" was required; I had "put on" a very small quantity during my year and a half of office; so a stipulated time was given to me to "show a substantial increase"—which was not shown. I could not persuade persons against their wishes by a specious line of argument and half-lies. It was no one's fault; only the "force of circumstances"; hence the superintendent and I parted, good friends, and remained so.

Finally, there came the local publication of "The Mermaid and Other Pieces," which was brought about by Mr. John Ballinger (the chief librarian) and Councillor Munn. When the book was printed, it fell to me to deliver or post the subscription copies. Postage meant a heavy expense; most of the copies were subscribed for

locally, and some promises had been asked and given that I would write my name in the books. So around I went, evening after evening, delivering my wares, like any travelling tinker or jobbing shoemaker. In the majority of the cases the utmost kindness and consideration were shown; but some persons I met with made me think that if the snob was the antithesis of sincerity, then almost every class was eaten to the core by snobbery. Of a different kind was the following, one of a few. A certain well-known philanthropist had put his name down for a copy of the book. He was very rich, and as exclusive in his social relations. When I called with the volume I was shown into the presence of the great man, who was too much educated to engage in trade. With becoming deference the humble bard stood there, seeing before him—a man; but remembering that neither manners nor the dignity of independence were the perquisites of the “idle rich.” Then this transpired—

“M’m, so you have brought the book.”

“Yes.”

“Well, here are the five shillings; but you need not leave the book.”

“Then I cannot take the five shillings.”

“But, you see, these things accumulate so.”

“Thank you, Mr. —. Then I would rather not leave ‘The Mermaid’ where such things accumulate so.” And I began to strap the volume in again with its fellows.

The great man looked at me in silence, then said, just before the strapping was finished, “Let me look at it.” I complied. He opened the book somewhere in the principal piece—I could not see exactly where—and read a page; next he perused a couple of sonnets, and added, “Very well, I will keep it. Here is a pen; write your name in it.”

“No—I cannot.”

"Why?"

"I only write in subscription copies."

"But I have subscribed."

"Pardon me, sir—you have not. You offered to *give* me five shillings. If you take the book now you buy it, as you would at Mr. ——'s," a bookseller who had put copies on sale in the town.

"But——." He paused, evidently fast for words, the while we looked quietly into each other's eyes. "Oh, well, I will buy it, then."

So ended that memorable meeting. Yet it was only an incident in a long series, the whole of which made up another "experience," which, if not so exciting as some of the wilder ones had been, was certainly far more instructive. The publication of that modest volume proved that there were in the neighbourhood many well-educated men and women to whom the mind was still the standard of the man, no matter what he wore or where he lived. In other ways it sadly disabused my mind of some ideas which were too gentle, too warmly human, too Christian not to be erroneous at the end of the nineteenth century. It showed that there are cads and boors in the "best society," Gothamites and worse in the college, and scamps under the eaves of Mother Church. Oh, the littlenesses that beat from day to day, doing malicious beggars' duty for the things which matter, under the conventional trappings of dress and social duties! To them what was a sailor but something uncouth, smelling of tar and fouler things, unable to walk without a suspicion of drink or a ship's deck—one being analogous to the other merely—or speak their English? How, then, could he do that, apart from his rough calling, which they could not? He had never been to school *properly*!—what "common" sailor ever had, in their sense of schooling? Then, pray, how could he know that which was dead to them? How

could he have intellectual attainments which lay beyond their narrow, puny grasp?—they who had been schooled right into their manhood!—ay, and womanhood! Ye gracious gods of mental training—and humbug! (Ye shibboleths of the prosaic possible!)—devils might come out of angels, Hebrew legend, Milton, and others had proved that thesis. But how could angels issue from devils? Such a phenomenon was against Nature—against the nature *they* knew. Surely once a devil always a devil, with an inevitable rise in devilship as time went on. To such persons it would be a most great wrench of mind to have always to remember that even Christ came out of Nazareth—that is if they recollect the character of Nazareth. How prone is average humanity to argue from its own consciousness, wide as the bridge of Al Sirat or a Narrowdale noon, instead of from gathered facts outside itself. It was possible that a “common” sailor might limn shipwrecks or draw the characters of swearing seamen, all tempestuously, of course; yet not as would be done by an “educated” person, to whose mental training even the virtue of faithfulness was a crude fault not to be excused. But how on earth could such an “individual” know anything of ancient Greek legend, mythology, or sonnet-structure? How could he understand something of the complexities of femininity; the subtleties of heart and mind; the pros and cons of great ventures in human hives where one falsity strangled another, where truth was a mummy in the screened-off corner of a museum, and the person who asked to see the rarity was a phenomenal fool or a criminal to be laid by the heels? How *could* he delve, and much less find gems, in such hidden strata in the mines of intellect and human nature? *They* could not! All their training, their “education” had not furnished *them* with the tools needful for such underground work! Why, wasn’t he said to have been

a scapegrace all his life, a miner-boy (witness his writings), and Heaven only knew what other enormities! Hadn't he been even a sort of *sans-culotte* in this very town of coal and city-aspirations, who couldn't have any well-to-do people, because he hadn't turned to them for help! How, then, could *he* climb where their crippled feet found no footing? He couldn't—he *hadn't* (as they had not), and there was an end to the whole matter!

O ye gods of grudging jealousy! O ye smirks of superiority that poison with your smiles! Oh, the occasions on which subscribers kept me while they ran their envious fingers over a few pages, to find this, that or the other which had been done *not* as *they* would have done the same thing! How many they were and who perpetrated them was docketed in the pigeon-holes of my secret intelligence department. But, knowing full well that only each intended mark of the satire would see its truth, I could not refrain from publishing in a local print: "To Certain Critics and Improvers of 'The Mermaid'"—

Sing to us, poets,—
We poorer ones
Hunger and long for the
Warmth of your suns.
Sing to us, sing to us,
Gifted of song!
Warm us and gladden us
Spur us along!

Oh, the glory and wealth of your songs and your love!—
Sweet sunbeams of joyousness drawn from above.

Laverocks human,
Thrushes of speech!
Stars of a firmament
We cannot reach,
Pour on our aching hearts
Song's soothing balm,
Teach us your gentleness,
Pity and calm;

On the high road, the low road, the rough road of life,
Oh, scatter your sweet songs and soften the strife!

However, despite the warm praise that was given by

critical journals to "The Mermaid," and to the sonnets in that book, London publishers would have none of my work. Two of them "regretted that 'The Mermaid' had not been offered to them"; but, unless I could guarantee the sale of so many copies, they would not touch the better things which I submitted. This has been my experience during fourteen years—though your work bears the mark of Apollo's mint, if your name be not as common as household words in the mouth of the nation, then you must pay for publication of your efforts; and the more beautiful they are, the more removed from sensationalism and from the dulness of prosaic life, the more will publishers refuse to take any risk with you. It is not that there is no taste for poetry to-day; the continual sale of reprints proves the fallacy of this reiteration; but that publishers, as a body, are now-a-days too keen for the lining of their pockets to care a brass farthing for the well-being of mental culture. Give them that which will sell—what it is matters little, but sell easily it must—and they will blazon your name far and wide as a *rara avis* that has flown into ken with a pearl of exceeding price in its mouth. What is more, as every worshipper in the temple knows, the truer are Apollo's priests—whether or not they be admitted as such by the people who come and go, yet worship not—the more averse are they to proclaim their rights, even in the few cases where they have the means to pay for that proclamation.

So it was that, whilst plays were almost accepted, I still had to drink the wormwood of unrequited striving, in place of that sweet wine of humble comfort for which my friends and I had looked forward. Then said some of them: Send a few copies to ——. They mentioned a certain log-rolling party of that day, to whose members five copies went. Three did not reply; one wrote a letter in which there was neither criticism, praise, nor

blame; the other, a very long-haired person with a pretty fancy, a tickling touch, and neither grip nor understanding of life, went out of his way to advise me to do anything for a living except write. To which I replied—

Roll on, thou light, fantastic logman, roll !
 Ten thousand truths sweep over thee in vain ;
 Thou markest verse with sickliness ! thy dole
 Stops with to-day ; upon the watery plain
 Of prettiness the buoys are all thy deed,
 And when thou'rt dead, damned * thou wilt be indeed !

* Damned by neglect. My creed damns no man in a biblical sense.

Well, what of it all? I was not a member of their gang—never was one of any literary clique; a boy-Ishmaelite of the hedgerow, later an Ishmaelite about the world generally, then one in journalism, now in literature—why should they roll a log for such an outsider? What was his work, what were his pains of effort, who was he to them? A sumptuously faring party of Diveses at the table of advertisement, to be at which meant guineas and further high feeding, what crumbs had they to spare for the Lazarus who all along the wayside had eaten his husks, drank his vinegar, dreamt his dreams of the stars, and was not one of their notoriety-mongering fold?

Ah, well! they are gone. And even when we needs must speak straight on, as Antony did, we should remember to be just. Though my aches and pains come back afresh at the recollection of those times, let others remember that log-rolling brotherhood for what good they knew of them.

During the autumn of that year Irving made his first appearance in Cardiff. By the kindly act of a friend¹ I was introduced to him and Mr. Bram Stoker. They read "The Mermaid," asked why I was staying in Cardiff—why did I not go to London? Because I had neither a post, a reputation, friends, nor means to go on. Would

¹ F. C. Fox, then editor of the *South Wales Echo*.

I go to the Lyceum for a while, till I found a footing on the London Press? Ye powers of amazement! Ye gods of the unexpected! Could it be that such a man would ask *me* to the Lyceum? An invitation from Claudius Æsopus to the chief Roman theatre of his day could hardly have caused much greater surprise, and certainly not more gratitude. Favoured beyond the dreams of wildest hope, I felt like one on whom falls soothingly "the benediction that follows after prayer." It was arranged that I should be at the Lyceum in December. That time drew near. Friends asked for some farewell verse. Two pieces were written; one was published, the other is here—

Fare ye well—a while we sever,
Scenes of pain where bitter passion dwelt,
Scenes of all my best endeavour
Here to picture beauties soul-deep felt;

Scenes where long days seemed to borrow
All the woes of Puritanic hells,
Where bright hopes on each to-morrow
Sought their graves 'mid Doubt's requiemed knells.

Now adieu, ye ambling waters;
Broader, deeper, sweeping tides I seek:
Fare ye well, you blue-eyed daughters,
Sons of plodding vales and hill-tops bleak.

Place of first sweet battle gainèd,
Field of scathing temperamental scars,
Thee I leave endeared, disdained—
Hope Ambition's bolted gate unbars.

Here good-bye, ye cold hearts, scorning
Pains ye lacked the wealth of soul to feel:
Fade your sneers, as mists of morning
Melt, tho' once they pierced like dagger-steel.

Softly, sadly comes the lingering,
Tender *Vale* unto friendly hearts;
Sorrow is these nerve-strings fingering,
While to life the love-sprung tear-drop starts.

Yet beneath it Joy is beaming
In the smile that breaks Grief's pals'ing spell;
Scenes of lustier hopes are gleaming—
Sorrow, glamour, friends and foes, Farewell!

CHAPTER XII

"Advertise, advertise"—"Pied" his page—The "tramp" in journalism—Fleet Street cargoes—A journalistic weather-cock—First novel—A momentous meeting—"The greatest of adventures"—Plans miscarried—"Fishers of the Sea"—Disaster—Reporting at a pound a week—A beneficial change—Moving the household gods—A hill-side parish—Another black Christmas—Success—A clear dawn—Two more novels—Striking camp again—A terrible fall—A cripple's address to the high road—Between ourselves—Farewell.

DURING the past eight or nine years—since I left Greenwich for Grimsby, first crippled with rheumatism—Christmas-time had been either a very high or a very low tide in my fortunes. When I went to the Lyceum that tide was at its equinoctial point, I thought—if this was not Bran himself, surely it was Bran's own brother. There I spent three happy seasons—in effect, a humble doorkeeper of the temple. But what mattered that? Was I not *in* the temple? It did not matter to me that I had neither paid half-a-guinea for a stall nor had stood since the forenoon in the pit queue to be present at a first night and to feel all its glow of enthusiasm. Ever a student of expression, seeking, metaphorically, always to put a lady into fine silks and laces and a navvy into moleskin, those three seasons were to me a liberal education in beauty, passion and the immortal truths of life as they are reflected across the footlights. Steeped in the old dramatists almost from first to last, I was yet ignorant of the new and full of "crank" ideas of the stage. Mr. Bram Stoker repeatedly said that I "was up in the clouds," and advised a friendly colleague to get hold of my coat-tails and pull me down whenever

he could. Yes, it was true enough—too true, alas ! But I had not then learnt that you must—

Advertise, advertise, advertise—
Whether Bibles, or whisky, or pies,
Cathedrals or huts, or political lies.
Remember this well,
Whatever you sell,
New ways to heaven,
Or old ways to hell,
Advertise, advertise, advertise,
Or you're sure to be left to the flies.

During that year and a half, whilst my notions of the drama were being changed from the old to the new by continually watching Irving, Duse, Coquelin and others, I was also undergoing a similar change with regard to Fleet Street. Vain was my search for that of which I had heard and read. In place of the journalism of Scotch whisky and big pipes, breadth of view, fearlessness and ability, I found that of tea-shops, cigarettes, narrowness and an evenness of mediocrity. Alas, what a change was there ! Blatant commercialism, training that ill-fits so many persons for what Nature never intended them, together with the Libel Acts, had turned a fine, stalwart, self-respecting, particularly English profession into a half-foreign weakness that was enough to make the patriot sigh for the well-being of his country. Still, here and there I met members of the old school, most of them pulling comfortably in the strange boat ; a few sitting quietly on the banks of the stream philosophically watching the new-fangled craft go by. Alas ! that the story of an odd one should be told in the following lines—

In the corner-seat of a tap-room foul
(Not a mile from Wine Office Court)
Sat a man, who mumbled beneath the cowl
Of a hat that had once spelt "sport."

He was not old and he was not young,
But had seen the world grow grey ;
So, as some men will, he wagged his tongue
In the gloom of that dying day.

"I have run my race, and the game is played—
(A comma here and a full-point there); . . .

I have closed my day, and my 'copy' 's laid
In the front of the editor's chair. . . .

"Christian, Pagan, Moslem, Jew—

(A par' of this is enough for the day), . . .

I have dealt with all . . . to the full of their due, . . .
So far as a pressman may. . . .

"Grandeur of civicdom, Royalty's shows—

(That Cabinet speech will be in to-night) . . .

Ladies of fashion and pugilist's blows . . .

Heavens of boredom . . . and hells of delight. . . .

"Murders and mysteries, scandals and plots

(Oh, for a headline fitting to this!) . . .

Cupboards with secrets, 'scutcheons with blots,

Tragic full-stops to some hot lovers' bliss. . . .

"I've had my day, but I . . . 'pied' the page—

(There's Reuter ticking an earthquake thro';

And now, to miss the news editor's rage, . . .

'Stop press' in the 'Final' . . . must have that, too.)" . . .

His head hung forward; the game was played—

("Final!" rang out on the cold night air);

He had run his race, and his "copy" was laid

In front of the Editor's Chair.

I make no excuse for lingering in the neighbourhood of Fleet Street; the hub of the Empire; the nation's daily meal and weekly fare of passing comment, from the *hors d'œuvres* to the fruit; that locality which, like the icy fastnesses of the Far North, ever draws a man back to it when once he has lived under its influence. It was here that I learnt to become a weather-cock in journalism, swinging to every changing wind of fact, fancy and necessity. It was another "experience," a voyage that was hard for me to navigate; hence many were the times when stores ran low, and those three days of hunger at sea were remembered, also that climb up the silver birch, and I asked myself if the "prize" was worth the toil. While I was a hardened "tramp" about the world generally, always suffering with that itch for scribbling which so amused the Roman satirist, I did not

think that it would fall to my share to become a "tramp" on the ocean of journalism. Rounding the Horn in bitter, foul weather under sail, and inwardly chanting something akin to that brutal and overpowering song of the howling gale and those great southern-bound rollers; becalmed under the huge and glaring Indian moon, lost a while in contemplating the peculiar mysticism and romance of the subtle East; well-nigh washed along the scuppers in a "doldrums" downpour, while pondering on the early Atlantic voyagers and their ships; steaming past the Ionian Isles on a still, starlit night and thinking of Sappho and her leap, or of the wandering Ulysses; churning up the green-white foam at eighteen knots an hour under a cloud of snowy sail along that fortieth parallel of southern latitude, by sailors termed "running the easting down," when the blood in one's veins fairly riots at the sheer glow of beauty and movement, if ever it riots at anything; or watching the icicles growing to the inboard side of the weather-rail, thickening to the girth of a man's leg, as the creaking old brig buffeted her way up the Baltic in the teeth of a winter nor'-easter that, according to the temperament of the individual, would turn a saint into another Poppæa, or whip the Devil out of his wickedness; in all these circumstances it was ever the same. Life was then mostly young; at first deliciously young, and health stood at tiptoe, peering into the very joy of living—of living the simple life of the wild, wide seas, on a "cracker," "salt horse," and weak coffee. Oh, but it was an Alexandrian existence in those years! Comparison would have made it ten times more so had I known enough of the heart-aches, and aches more material, of those other years then to come.

But the "tramp" in journalistic London, and the "tramp" there on the high seas—how like to each other they are! It sometimes made me think that once a

"tramp" always a "tramp." Besides, that likeness is not merely a general one. Just as there are degrees of quality and of social position among the "tramps" of journalism, so are there among ocean wanderers. The literary nomad, who contributes only to high-class magazines and reviews, has his nautical parallel in the handsome clipper "windjammer." So, too, has the writer for a certain nameless class of penny periodical his fellow in the dirty little packet that cuts down freightage on mean cargoes and runs to petty ports which are—in effect—not recognized on the larger vessel's charts. Moreover, even the buccaneer of old and the Algerian pirate of yesterday are typified in this modern world of the pen. I mean those "tramps" who cruise around in dark places with a trawler's net to gather in the ideas of other men; for there is far more of this secret piracy practised on the ocean of journalism and literature than is dreamt of by the landsmen-dwellers around its shores; and, to judge by what one hears and sees (which, after all, is about the sum total of human evidence), there is more of it on the Sea Dramatic than there is on the great outside ocean.

Here I was once more an adventurer; and, to go back over the course a little way, the mere writer on commission is not one in this grand array of adventurers. He is just a specialist in some particular way, with a pedantic definition of each word in the language. He is not one of your hawkers of ideas. He is not an adventurer sailing around with a precious cargo, of his own acquiring, on those troubled waters that lie between Paternoster Bay on the east and Publisher Harbour on the west. His is the dead level sameness of running cargoes which are supplied to him. The excitement of adventure, the flush of carrying a load that seems—*pro tem.* alas!—to be a treasure-trove, or of landing one that unexpectedly proves to be such, are all unknown to him. He

sails ever on a calm sea; and fine weather never makes good sailors, be the voyage wherever it may. Cut him adrift from his "line" and what is he?—just a rudderless derelict; a captain without sextant, chart, or compass on a strange sea. True, he has the envy of some "tramps"; but they approximate only to the Scandinavian "timber drogher," built of soft wood. These are not the real oak-built, copper-bottomed "tramps" that sail on and on, knowing that some day they will come sailing out of the far-off seas that lie beyond the charted limits of common cruises—sailing home into the Harbour of Achievement with a cargo from their own particular Spanish Main, a cargo of treasure that shall bring all merchants to compete for others from the same rare shores. Oh, it is good, very good, to be a "tramp"—at such times; yea, and at other times too. For, mark you, there is a far sweeter pleasure in expectation than there ever can be in realization. That beating against the wind for the distant and difficult port is a rare delight, a tonic that physics pain; whereas, the reaching of the goal is often as ashes in the mouth.

Some folks say there is no adventure now-a-days in the channels, rivers, backwaters and lagoons that form the approaches and inlets to the Fleet Street Sea; that adventure went out with the clay pipe and the whisky of some twenty years ago. But those who talk in that strain are only the lordly "liners," who steam straight through the open sea and know nothing of the waters beyond. Believe me, as there is now a little fleet for every Grub Street Harbour packet of the old days, so have the opportunities for adventure increased. And never a day goes by without these fleets—the free-lances who go daily to different offices with different kinds of "copy" sailing in and out of the many ports that dot those channels, rivers, lagoons and backwaters. It is only the climatic conditions of the ocean that have

changed, owing to the Gulf Stream of Taste having altered its course, and thus brought into existence a different set of "tramps." Just as the heavy Scots three-decker and the more or less rakish Irish privateersman have passed away, so are we in an age of respectable dulness that serves as a sea-mist to hide the real "tramp," who, nevertheless, plies to and fro with his chance cargoes. The trim-built wit and satirist have left us, alas! and the snippet packets have taken their place; especially is this the case in the commerce routes of journalism that intersect the great ocean, and there only has adventure decreased.

There be those who decry the literary "tramp" of to-day; who say that he has no force of character—no individuality; they forgetting the while that both on the sea of journalism and on the ocean of literature this is a day of commonplace craft that have no distinctiveness either in rig or build, simply because the journalistic merchants will not buy any strange or rare cargoes. Even amongst the better-found and manned "tramps" themselves, there are many murmurings against the change in that Gulf Stream just mentioned. To them I say—

O fellow-voyagers for those seas
Where Isle Achievement fronts the West,
Pine not because the Port of Ease
Still lies beyond your venturous quest.

Your beating makes for one good thing
On streams of thought, against the wind;
To Nature's plan your parts you bring
To give each age its master-mind.

For many failures must be tried
Ere shapes the build of perfect form;
You are the forces that provide
The strength that marks the rising storm.

Yes, it cannot be denied that there are tragedies and other sad things such as wrecks, castaways, and jetsamed cargoes on this ocean, whereof I write so indifferently.

But the philosophy is that there are the same on all seas, and must be so long as there is human effort after far-off harbours on that coast of Magic Spell, whereto all steer and of which so few of us have true charts. Still it is heigh-ho! for the life of the literary "tramp," which is so full of adventures and surprises, and yet may bring us that coveted cargo of treasure-trove from some far-off sea.

So it was with me till I had contributed to upwards of fifty periodicals and news-sheets, from half-crown reviews to half-penny "dailies" and boys' papers; had been a critic of drama, edited an illustrated journal, and reviewed general literature for three of the principal ones of those days—usually in some degree of comfort, because my needs were still as simple as of old. Yet there were times when a day went in long Surrey tramps, with dates, biscuits and pipe for sustenance, in the land of plenty when I could call at an inn for a glass of bitter ale; and with the ever-accompanying note-book into which went verses, plots, aphorisms, etc., all to be afterwards cut out and stowed away in separate envelopes or pasted in books which were kept for that purpose—life at sea having taught me the value of "a place for everything and everything in its place." And how each idea for a book, play or a new kind of magazine became an obsession that died a hard and lingering death! All the time big efforts were being turned out, and as regularly turned out again by publishers. Comedies, tragedies, satires on prominent men, novels, short stories, poems, essays, general articles and summaries of such projected books as "A History of the Mercantile Marine," "The Annals of the Naval Brigade," the synopsis of a new Utopia told by the means of a romance, and plots, with lyrics, for the librettos of operas, all went out and all came back. I was no club-man, a member of no literary coterie, nor did it appeal to me to be either. I

had only my wares to sell; and they were neither of the machine-made obvious, so beloved of editors of "popular" magazines and wide-sale-seeking publishers' readers; nor were they arrestingly real, not even incidental and sensational; they were only quietly real—as I saw reality—with some little efforts at natural humour and literary graces. Thus did the scales fall slowly away from eyes that had looked on journalism and literature through the glasses of past phases, and had coloured even them with imagination and ideality which were not found in cold practice. At this time I was troubled seriously with certain "notions" as to how, when, why and what books should be published; such as this one: I would give every book, play, verse and piece of music a hundred years of copyright; then it should be issued only by the State for the benefit of self-respecting writers and musicians whose work was of a given quality and who would not, or could not, "play down to popular tastes." No private venturer in commercialism should make a penny from the brain-work of those who, likely enough, starved whilst the work was done. This was but one of a number of such ideas, and many will smile at it as a mere Utopian theory. But every practician was a theorist at the outset. Every successful venture in the world, except accidental discoveries in science, has been the result of a theory. Archimedes, Columbus, Galileo, Harvey, Davy, and all of their kind, were but theorists at the beginning. However, such things are of small moment here, and one is enough as a weather-vane to show how the wind blew occasionally.

To mention a small matter, more curious than anything else. The South African War was then stirring the nation's enthusiasm. Being something of a patriot, seeing a host of new "experiences" out there and sick to the soul with striving against what appeared to be an inexorable fate, I volunteered to join the Yeomanry, was

sent down to Trowbridge, passed in riding and shooting and was declared to be "medically unfit." On my return to London I took down the "Iliad," closed my eyes, opened the book and "pricked" a page to see what the gods said on this matter, as I had read of being done both with it and with a more sacred book. The words into which my pin-point stuck were: *Not fated yet to die.*

Finally a manuscript novel, dog-eared in the rounds, found a publisher. It was good, quiet, honest work—life without either prurience or "problems," and with small use of exclamation marks. But, like an actor who has missed the cue for his entrance, it made its debut through the wrong portals. For (not that I would tell all the secrets of that lazaretto through which fortune has passed me, whether to my good or ill must ever be a source of speculation to me and probably matters nothing to any one else) just as one should not go to a cheesemonger for a mousetrap—although there is a certain link between the two—so there are publishing houses that cannot sell five hundred copies of a novel which a firm of different repute generally can dispose of to the extent of three times that number. It is an undeniable fact that publishers' imprints are taken largely as evidences of the values of different books, and that, too, in the offices of eminently respectable journals that publish reviews. It is for this reason, in many a case, that we often see, especially in the columns of daily papers, a book of fairly considerable account dismissed with a couple or three inches of cold justice; while alongside of such a notice a column to a column and a half is given to a book that, flagrantly on the faces of the reviews themselves, is not worth the space that is allotted to the more important publication. On this point, however, it is always necessary to take into consideration the fact as to whether or not the author of the book "moves" within

the charmed circle of log-rolling. On these subjects, alas! how much could be written! And why should the lash be spared on those who whip mercilessly, either in sheer ignorance, absurd jealousy or downright malice; and who never admit the evil of the punishment they inflict, nor abate it, unless they are lashed in return? It is a fine thoroughbred to a donkey that there is not a self-respecting author of prominence who would not crack his whip on this, if he were to tell that truth which the vinegar of injustice has eaten into him. But let me turn to another matter, of so inestimable a nature in comparison that it cleanses the cup of its gall and leaves it full of sweet tenderness.

It came about at this time that I met her whose coming gave new life to half-dead hopes, put fresh vigour into old ambitions, sent aspirations soaring again from dull, cold earth; who gave to life that beauty and that solemn significance which one feels when the alternate stanzas of "The Story of the Cross" are sung in deep reverence by a priest in the organ-loft, and the responses are made, with equal emotion, by a thinly-scattered congregation in a dim church. She, a descendant of an old Scots family, named Pittendreigh,¹ was then studying for the concert-platform, and further weakening a delicate constitution by slum-work in what should have been leisure hours. Our meeting was owing to my being called in, by a mutual friend, to help her in staging a small opera for charity purposes. This meant many rehearsals, much talk, and presently a spirit-bond that needed no words for its declaration. That friend "still

¹ One of her ancestors, a Lord Pittendreigh, was an eminent Scots judge, who wrote what was apparently the first book on Scottish law. He was also—and truth compels this addition—one of the party who murdered Darnley, notwithstanding the fact that he had already served in the galleys for being concerned in the assassination of Cardinal Beaton, whose death put an end to church tyranny in Scotland.

questioned me the story of my life, from year to year. I ran it through, even from my boyish days. This to hear would Desdemona seriously incline : but still affairs would draw her thence ; which ever as she could with haste dispatch she'd come again, and with a greedy ear devour up my discourse : which I observing, took once a pliant hour ; and often did beguile her of her tears, when I did speak of some distressful stroke that my youth suffered. Upon this hint I spake " thus—

No, not as one deserving aught in fee,
Come I, thy vassal,—eager, yet untried :
No worthiness have I to plume my pride,
Save that I love thee past all men's degree.

So poor in all but love ; in love so free
To count myself the lord of kingdoms wide
Await to serve their largess at thy side,
With each heart-revenue love may decree.

Thus, Sweet, come I ; and coming so I ask
For nought save love—thy heart's rare spirit-wine,
Untasted, rich, thyself the beauteous flask.
And if we trade in commerce so divine,
Making its nobler use our life's glad task,
We shall not fear when God's eyes on us shine.

How tenderly, how graciously in the darkest of hours, when the life of a thing has ebbed dangerously near to low-water mark, comes to our help that destiny, regardless of which we go gropingly, stumblingly, complainingly onwards ! So it was here—a new and permanent incentive, guide, guerdon, comrade. But although this fresh, inspiriting light streamed along the path, the latter still led through a hostile country. Manuscripts came back, at first seemingly worse than before. In spite of all my seeking I could obtain no post. New channels of the pen were tried in desperation, one being the advice of friends—to write of the sea, a matter in which I, purblindly and because of all its obviousness to me, could see nothing to write about. In this wise affairs mended. Next, a big firm of printers

came so near to launching a new sort of magazine, which I submitted to them, that the mere fact of this led to new openings for work. Finally I engaged to go to Cape Town, there to edit a bi-weekly paper, in consequence of which our banns were published. But the undertaking fell through. Then Dr. Phillips—who had left the *Hamadryad*, was practising in London, already filling a public medical office, and to whose house we often went—said in his quiet, emphatic way, that either Miss Pittendreigh must leave London at once for a long spell, if not for good and all, or the result would be rapid consumption. On this account we decided on immediate marriage, and flight to the east coast, where the North Sea would bring its salt vigour to strengthen her weakened lungs and repair her general ill-health. Freelancing was paying again. The editors for whom I worked promised that out of sight should not be out of mind. Two dabblers in literature were to become our “paying guests.” A book or a play might go any day. And, to crown all, it would be so easy to let the house, furnished, during two or three months in the summer, thus paying the whole year’s rent. Alas! for the optimism of such occasions! Yet we knew married folks who lived comfortably, ministering to their physical and mental needs, on less than what these prospects held up so enticingly. And if there were no optimism, well-placed or ill-placed, what of the world of men and things?—ashes, sackcloth for the body and the mind; every night the end of an empty day, every morning the beginning of another blank. So came this greatest adventure, greatest “experience” of all—not undertaken lightly, as the others had been; but with due questioning and a prayer for God’s blessing; and with all reverence, as we walked along the lanes, on one of the most perfect days the world ever saw, and into a little ivy-clad church within sound of the sea’s old melody.

A profit and loss account had been carefully worked-out on paper; not an item was missed. But nothing happened as that prospectus had foreshadowed; not that it was in anywise fraudulent, or ignorantly drawn up. "The mine did not pan out," that was all. Those "paying guests" went elsewhere, and all our advertisements brought only the undesirable. Let the house we could not, tastefully furnished though it was, touched here and there with little graces from her hands, and helped out by a hundred and fifteen old prints, large and small, which I had framed in leisure hours to save cost and to lend an air of individuality to the house. Nor was sub-letting allowed by the lease. Then the worst began to break upon us—either worry was driving me out of touch with my work, or those for whom I had worked were growing to be unduly fastidious. In any case, it was coming back; and the rate of the returns increased till, after other desperate ventures had been tried, and dozens of advertisements answered in vain, I became a literary "ghost" by selling a drama—as a thief sells to a receiver, that none may know whence the article came. So far this was the bitterest pill of all. Now, indeed, I would turn to the brazen trombone of life; and, within certain limits of self-respect, no one should blow it louder than I. Fancy had been served all too long, and the jade had paid me badly—very badly on the whole. Now would I turn to life, *life*. I would collect persons, places, incidents, atmospheres from actuality and group them into sets; each set to be a book with an actual locality, but with an informative story running through it and woven of passions and sacrifices, the glow of aspirations, the victory of dogged energy, the refinings of frustrations, smiles, tears and such lessons of life as I could draw from that endless book. But it should all be *life*. And the snippers and mincers and trimmers, they who tripped it gaily in the limelight of notoriety, could go their way;

I would not follow—because I could not. So while she secured a few pupils in singing, I made out a long and painstaking draft concerning a “Life” series of novels, and sent to publisher after publisher—to come back every time, coldly “Declined with thanks.”

In the meantime continued effort was made to obtain a post or get work to do at home. Again I became a private tutor, and the first of the “Life” series, “Fishers of the Sea,” was written—with the gall-cup at our mouths all the while, her health beginning to suffer again as before, and me powerless to stop the ravages of worry. The story was declined. We had nailed our faith on its being accepted off-hand; to us it was “strong meat,” virile, *life*, therefore in a day of attenuated perfumes a pungent odour must force its way along—patchouli could not fail of attention in the midst of violets, pansies and flowers of less distinction. Hence its rejection was, to me, as the death-knell of all things. To her it put terrible questions which she could not answer, yet her faith held on. In the midst of it all there came the sudden news of Dr. Phillips’s death. Surely, I said, surely fate is piling on the tragedy ready for the fall of the curtain on the last act! But she kept back her tears, in my presence, bade me be of courage again—and went to her bedside to pray. A hundred miles separated us from the funeral, to which circumstances would not allow us to go; but we spent the hour of it silently in a neighbouring church.

Again the novel was sent away, and we—knowing that its second rejection would bring disaster upon us, in spite of all our frugality and the fact that she made all her clothing—began to learn a simple system of shorthand, me for the purpose of leaving her and trying reporting as a last effort, and she to encourage me along. In a fortnight eighty words could be written. A few days later the novel was accepted; the situation was saved, and we lifted our heads in thankfulness. Then

immediately came the announcement that the publisher was in financial trouble and could not issue the book!

Much as Hood pictured Eugene Aram leaving the town of Lynn, I left that Golgotha of our hopes and endeavours covered with the disgraceless shame of failure that was made all the more bitterly sad by having to leave behind a poor, fragile wife with an empty purse, a few pupils in music, heart-broken at our first separation; all my treasured books, first editions and old prints gone. What a night of gloom to end a day that had promised so fair at its dawn! This was a fortnight or so before Christmas, the old high or low water mark in my affairs. In London, when the last few shillings were chinking their premature elegy in my pocket, I secured, by the help of a friend, a post as reporter for a news-agency—at a salary of a pound a week! This, however, the manager raised to twenty-five shillings during the second week, apparently as a sop to the Cerberus of that dark, subterranean stream which he looked on as his conscience. The hours agreed on were ten to six; very quickly ten was changed to nine; and an analysis presently showed that the six was seven to eight on four nights in the week and ten to eleven on one night. But the meanest thing of all was when there came a telephonic commission to me, in my absence, to write a *literary* article for use on the following morning in one of the daily papers; the manager's order was: That I should not be allowed to write the article in office-hours and would be kept on duty till eleven o'clock—the hour when the work was to be in—that night, unless I paid the agency one-half the price of the article! Not only was I engaged merely to report meetings, speeches and the like; no man on the staff ever wrote such articles, nor put his name to his work! Still that lordly salary, added to the little I was earning again by reviewing, enabled me to send half of it regularly to her. Then, in March, she joined me, and

we entered on a six-months' tenancy of a Bloomsbury cellar—for euphony's sake termed a basement flat, which her deft hands transfigured into a home, and where the strains of music again made the harshness of life bearable. Our next move was to Brixton. Then, when Christmas-tide was again in the air and festivities and brief holidays were the common talk; when that ten to six had become a regular nine to ten or eleven, with a weekly turn at eight in the morning, midnight on Saturday, and a whole day Sunday-duty, for which the salary had been raised to thirty shillings per week!—when the sweating had reached its utmost limit, and I had said a few polite words to the manager on the unknown subject of equalization between work and payment, I was told that my “services were no longer required.”

However, the dark period on this occasion was a short one. Just after Christmas I had the good fortune to join the staff of a well-known evening gazette. And what a change was here! Straight from conscienceless sweating to a comfortable, gentlemanly employ! Now it seemed that Tyche was relenting from her long and hard usage of us. That east coast disaster and its immediate year of privations brought us new friends in journalism. Back in the atmosphere of happenings, in the mental hubbub of Fleet Street, it was so much easier to do the right piece of work and get rid of it, than had been the case a hundred miles away. Every effort in the way of a book still came back; but my general work increased. All the same, though, that jade at the wheel of things had not finished turning her foul-weather spokes in our direction. First she reminded me of old times by making me have to roll smartly from under a 'bus-horse's feet, one dirty night in the Strand, when I was bound to a political dinner. Her next unkind attention was to drive us out of London again. On account of my wife's health it was imperative that we should seek a place where the

air blew fresh and sweet, where the health-giving scent of loam came up to mingle with that of Nature's greenery.

So (to pause for a few smiles and a little geniality in this vinegary elegy) we up and got us abroad to spy out the land, armed with sundry "literature" concerning localities, soils, altitudes, water, gas, rent, rates, taxes, transit facilities and the like. In addition I, it being second-nature to one who had spent some years in the close communion of charts and maps, carried a number of the latter on each week-end voyage of discovery. The gentle soul, who bore me company in that search for a new resting-place for the humble gods of the household, who saw beauty in each blade of grass and loveliness in the hidden grace of trees, which to me were merely trees and grass and nothing more on such journeys, she—sooth, but she scoffed (if scoffing were possible in one so gently constituted) at my charts and talks of aspects and the cardinal points of the compass. As for nor'-nor'-east, east-south-east, sou'-sou'-west and other composite bearings—why, they had as well been spoken to that little pocket indicator of the magnetic north, which had borne me gracious company, in fair and foul scenes, more than once around this shifting globe.

Like that home-seeking pilgrimage of Æneas of pious memory, our wanderings took us into strange places; whereby we learnt much as to the navigating of divers channels that lead into and out of London. And happy, indeed, were we in the comings and goings, in spite of certain disappointments. It was a time of great adventures, teeming with possibilities. For next to the initial beginning of housekeeping comes the pleasure of change, so be it that one is not changing from a roof-tree that has grown dear from associations; where every room and every nook holds silent records of treasured happenings, ready to speak whenever memory unseals her chambers

locked and curtained by the strenuous things of later life. It is a pilgrimage that has in it all the elements of speculation, chance, discovery, and excitement that delights rather than sates. On every voyage you sail outward with a buoyant deck-load of hope, ballasted with certain parcels of judgment and the reason of sweet sanity, in search of a Golden Fleece with which (in the matter of possession if not in material) you may sail home again with the coast fishers in the dusk of evening. And if a few voyages end in harbours barren of satisfactory moorings, still you go again hopefully till your port of Colchis is found—for to the optimistic all things are possible. Then there is the incidental pleasure, in a chance-found harbour that *may* serve for an anchorage on the greater voyage which we are all navigating, of fitting—to change the simile—the various portions of one's material cargo to the different, more or less water-tight compartment of a house; of finding unexpected conveniences in the shape of lockers for stowage, and of laying out the garden to one's individualistic fancy. For, mark you, he who comes of the soil, though he sails farther and longer than all the Sinbads, the Cooks and the Vasco da Gamas have done, has ever the scent of the loam in his nostrils—a scent which your townsman bred knows not and cannot acquire. Thus, as did that Lord Bateman of the "north countree" and the old-time ballad, we sailed east and we sailed west. But we did not "come to proud Turkee." No, our landing was more like that of Priam's son, on hills that dominate some thirty miles of country—hills whence the fair-haired, stolid Angles looked west to the coal-smokeless Londinium of their day, not as we did through a Turneresque haze out of which St. Paul's dome sometimes appeared like an inverted teacup. We had found a tiny "residence," about the size of a park-gate lodge, half-hidden in big, old trees; with a spinny between it and a lane at the back, a

carriage-drive and no stables, a fountain and no water except what the shallow well produced; a rose garden and a patch of currant and gooseberry bushes, but all so overgrown with weeds and rank grass that only the tops of the shrubs could be seen. It was the day of our flight. The household gods were on the road from sacked Troy, and to await their coming we camped in that scene of neglect; till I fell to planning a mast and topmast to fly the house-flag, on the hill amidst the rose-trees; so that ships in the offing (*i. e.* friends at the railway-station) could see the flag and sail up the estuary, without a pilot, to the right anchorage. But she of the gentle make said that a rose garden was not a ship's deck, at which incontinent truth I lapsed into silence and sadness at the untowardness of things of shore-life. Anon we went to sleep amid the wreckage. Then morning came. And, lo! I stood on the threshold, in the sunlight that bathed the hills towering to God, thanking Him for His goodness, for the robin that twittered at my feet heedless of me, for the thrush that sang in the tree near by, and for the feelings which I could not express. Like most other pilgrims of time—

Oft had I bivouacked on the moors of pain,
Not knowing when the morn would come to strike my camp again.

But here, in an English June, with so much work to do and good health to the helping of it, and with so many blessings for which to be thankful—what mattered the flints and thorns, the pitfalls and cold nights of bitterness left behind? We had shed our tears in the scenes of them, and it was not good that we should tread the vinegar-press merely because we had known its bitters. So we fell-to on the flotsam and jetsam that had been left us overnight by those three wild horses and three wilder men. And, lo! again it was evening. Our pictorial banners were hung—some of them—on the inner walls. The books that told of great doings on greater

seas were back on their accustomed shelves by the window through which the hawthorn hedge, with yokel curiosity, tried to thrust itself into such strange company. The curious things, from far-off nooks of the world, and the battered swords, were again in their places. The little grand piano sent its strains of "Lieder ohne Worte," Bach, Beethoven and others of their fashion out amongst the roses and under the spreading oaks. Then her voice—not what it had been, alas!—blended with them. And what place could trials hold against that and an easy-going pipe? And so the night closed in. We sat on the hill-side, and God was good.

So the days went by in journeys to and from Fleet Street; while the evenings were all too short for the digging, rearranging, felling trees in order to extend the kitchen garden—plus wood enough for two winters—and so provide the household with vegetables (which was presently done at the total cost—not including the labour from which I derived health and pleasure—of three-half-pence a week per head of the household, with a varied and plentiful supply the year round); in wheel-barrow-work by moonlight, lopping trees over the house to get more light through, and in twisting, bending, growing and rustic-seat-making all to shape "My Lady's Bower" in a corner of the little wood. Then there was the study of life in that hill-side parish, twenty-odd miles from London, yet no more rural in its inhabitants, trend of thought and the like than an East End suburb—a place that contained an immortal satire, if only it could have been done by the pen of one in whom Nature had properly intermixed the characteristics of Rabelais and Cruikshank. Great gods in little breeches!—what was here? We did not find the expected sterling traits and tenets of the country-side, such as would have been found in a north-country village where the veneering of quasi-education and the empty imitation of the "idle rich"

have not yet played the snake's part in a Laocoon that is going on so prevailingly within thirty miles of London, and more or less around all large towns. With the exception of some three homesteads, here it was the vapid tragedy of the commonplace, smirched with an ignorant socialism of the destructive order. What a place in which to compare "training," as it is known in the lower walks of commercialism, with the agriculturist—master and workman—who was daily at home with Nature! True, his logic was crude, but it was logic—the logic that is taught by the simple philosophy of recurring seasons; theirs was a muddle of shallow subterfuge and prevarication. His English was not quite so good as theirs; but in place of their trained emptiness—that wonderful imitatory parrot-learning which these islands happily had not when there was more real education in the few and not a disturbing, half-useless semblance of it in the many—he had some originality of thought, woefully backward though he was politically; ay, and even so in crop-producing, cattle-breeding and the like. His morality, of the lack of which we hear so much now-a-days, was quite as good as that of his urban equal. His table-manners might be a step or two below theirs; but how preferable he was as a companion for a spare hour! From them, as from their kind everywhere, I could learn nothing beyond emptiness and exasperation; while from him I gathered keynotes for thought which were generally less of him than around him and of that Nature whereby he lived.

Thus Christmas drew near again, bringing the irregularly recurring black cloud in its train. Two years of comparative peace had gone by; in work, two years as full of happiness as, I suppose, such an unquiet creature could expect to spend outside of heaven. There was to be a reduction in the staff of the paper. I was the junior member; and the eve of Yuletide found us looking to the

New Year with much misgiving. Once more the old efforts were put in at free-lancing and in striving to obtain another post; one being successful and the other useless. Then the manuscript of "Fishers of the Sea" was again brought out. Surely it was the most rejected of addresses that had ever been offered, for that bad penny had already come home twenty-four times! Still there were three or four publishers who might be tried. It went to one, and came back accompanied by one of De Maupassant's books, and an intimation that the firm would like to see the MS. again when I had made "certain alterations." Then we two talked the subject over, with this result: If that publisher thought the work good enough to be altered into an imitation of the French master, then it was fit, and had better, go under its own sign-manual. We would try again. There was Mr. John Murray at one end of the scale, said I, the extreme west of the matter; and there was So-and-so's, down in Norfolk, who might be tempted because of the fishing nature of the thing. Here goes, heads for the west and tails for the east, twice out of three, and up went the "lucky" shilling that I had found just without the garden gate on the day we went to live there. This was the order: Head, tail, head. Then the MS. was packed off. In ten days came an acceptance, and I cried: "All glory be to God this day and all the days hereafter!" Within a month the thing was bowing humbly to critics who hailed it, from Aberdeen to the south coast, as a piece of *literature*.

The book was freely and favourably compared to the work of dead and living, English and foreign masters! And twenty-five times refused! We could hardly believe what we read. Ye gods of ignorance and commercialism, that ape your belittling way in a nation's mentality! how many of you were doing beggars' duty as publishers' readers when that manuscript was on its four-

years' journey?—When no publisher's Calypso would sing that siren-song: "Stay, O Wanderer, stay with us!" Poor, insignificant, heart-crushed, still-hopeful, gall-saturated, twice-crippled I to be lifted to the feet of my long-worshipped GODS on the high and sacred mount of literature—what a heart-in-the-mouth feeling it gave! What humility, what chastened thought, what wondering of other neglected ones on the wayside it brought in its train! And how those burning quagmires of struggle, marking that track of years behind, suddenly seemed to fold in their vicious flames and be at peace. Not that I should be conceited over what others had said of my work. Could all the grinding in the hard mill in that dark valley there have left a scrap of conceit in the crushed kernel? No—no more than the last turn of the stones could have squeezed out that self-knowledge, self-faith and bitterness not unmixed with contempt which the earlier grinding had put in. These critics were possibly as fallible as those who had fulminated their venom at the true masterpieces of dead hands; but, and this was the point to me, they helped me to that self-analysis, self-deduction, appraisalment and purpose which must otherwise have ever contained elements of doubt. So came the following, which was written during a morning walk about a month after the book appeared.

Fair was this dawn, the wind at east,
The welkin clear, the offing free;
My chart of life I ope'd, to feast
My soul on ports beyond the sea.

"Unmoor!—Cast off, and follow me!
Why dawdle here?" the fresh breeze said.
"Now all's aboard—What may not be?
This harbour speaks alone the dead."

Adrift from Earth's material wiles,
My sails all spread, the sheets hauled taut,
I set my course for distant isles
In sunlit, sapphired seas of thought.

And as my bark, careening, sought
 Morgana's port across the deep,
 Serene in pleasance I caught
 Such thoughts as erst had made me weep.

The heave of Fancy's buoyant deck,
 The white-flecked blue that gave new hope,
 Put off such things as death and wreck,
 Left far astern Care's binding rope.

New scenes I saw for wider scope;
 Fresh purposes my being thrilled;
 Clear vision came where I did grope;
 New strength my weakened sinews filled. . . .

My port in sight, the signals read,
 My craft I wore for home again;
 Wind hauling free, vain shibboleths dead,
 And all my canvas full of strain. . . .

Night cups with diamond-dome the main;
 A calm, full moon hangs 'bove the land,
 As, tide-swept, to my quay I gain—
 For ever-more to understand.

Thus passed a happy year. "Watchers by the Shore" was written, published, was given a welcome reception on the whole; and I was ordered to take a long rest, or the result would be a complete breakdown. We both needed it, the first holiday in all those years; so off to the beloved North Sea we went. Whilst we were there the above novel was passing through the hands of the reviewers, some of whom gratuitously told me that *I* knew nothing of the lives of the poor—I, who have lived and worked with miners, fishermen, coasters, dock-labourers, agriculturists, etc.; who have gathered "material" at first-hand from the workaday lives and social relaxations of a dozen other different trades and manual occupations, and would not attempt to write a novel on any phase of life into which I had not penetrated enough for the purpose. "Oh, but I do know those who are accounted wise"—or think they are, which is all the same to them—by differing from the opinions

of others; those to whom bald statement and flat contradiction is criticism; those young men to whom all things in life are *blasé*, except life, of which they know nothing. Have I not lived and worked with them, too?—more to my pain and hurt than any other class ever caused me! Yes, I do know them well, those critics of Suburbia, who from the age of eight or nine years to sixteen or seventeen probed the depths of life in boarding-schools, who since then have lived the eventful life of morning and evening tram or train to and from some spot within a mile of the Law Courts, and to whom all the annals of literature are known—during the past twenty years, with a handful of the great names thrown in as means of rescue in tight corners. Oh, Popular Education, what literary crimes and humbugs have come in thy wake! Still, let me be not too pontifical. It is, alas! so natural to strike in return for chance blows when one is barely out of a long, hard battle. We all have sinned and come short—of the perfecting touches. And it were not wise that I, who am but a humble acolyte in the temple, should speak too much as a priest of the order.

On our return to the pretty little “residence” on the bleak north side of that hill, I sat down to write “Tillers of the Soil,” the material for which I had gathered mainly during the past three years. A friendly publisher strongly advised me “not to leave the sea.” He would have had me all my life playing on a one-stringed instrument, with ever the same tune, but in different keys; while all the time there was the whole gamut of human nature, industrialism, commercialism, art and politics lying ready to any hand that could wring new measures out of them. Well, I thought I knew better what cargo the vessel carried than any other person could know by the few parcels which were already landed. So again stubbornness pursued its way. One chapter was written.

Then there came a break. The house was so draughty as to have caused me chronic neuralgia, and the clay soil tended to bring back rheumatism. So we would strike camp again, and would probably have gone into caravan life had the season been more propitious. Immediately a place was secured a few miles away. Everything was settled. The move was to be made at mid-week. On the Monday, being unable to get any satisfactory assistance, I began to take down the topmast from which our house-flag had flown so gaily and so often; when a stay broke and dropped me eighteen feet, sheer "up and down" as I stood on a thick bar of wood. The one thing I remember, while lying on the bed to which I was carried, and knowing that spirit-hand was near me again, was hearing the wife of an artist-friend say to the delicate little woman who had bound her fortunes up with my rough ones, as they stood in the corridor outside—

"Don't cry—it will be all right."

"Ah! . . . you have . . . your children. . . . I have only him."

After a sojourn in a kindly neighbour's house, and the medical decision that nothing but my legs were injured, I was conveyed to the new home; where weeks went by the while I lay looking across meadows at a road I knew so well and was, apparently, never to tread again. So it was that, one forenoon when the pain was severe, I reached a block of scribbling-paper and wrote—

O road that leads to London Town,
But two green fields away,
What pageantry of life you speak
To me this autumn day!—
O high road, O broad road, O road to London Town!

There be who trudge you, less a frown—
While others lie in pain—
Big hearts with hopes at city end;
God speed them to their gain
Along you, upon you, O road to London Town! . . .

Three caravans go clinking down—
Gay paint, jig-jog,—how free!
And, heavens, how they seem to flaunt
Their liberty at me!—
At me, who loved you dearly, O road to London Town!

How oft, with dogs at heels, to drown
The ills that life infest,
I've footed miles upon you, till
Old life took on new zest—
O high road, O broad road, O road to London Town!

Now round yon bend and past the "Crown"
A whistling drover goes,
Mayhap with no more grief to tell
Than what a highway knows
From dawn to dusk in winter, O road to London Town. . . .

You're called the King's Highway—poor clown,
Sometimes I thought you mine!
But now—O God! must it be so,
That I shall watch and pine?—
And tread no more in freedom my road to London Town!

Heaven send ye, then, wayfarers brown—
I *have* a pilgrim been.
And see you bear each one to port
Of love and fortune green,
O high road, O broad road, O road to London Town.

It was Christmas-time again, and the world appeared to us to be very black; but work had to be done. Long lying in bed and looking at the ceiling was one way to a mad-house. So with a small cushion tied to each knee, by way of a pad, I "dogged it" from room to room, finding some amusement in this novel mode of locomotion—providing that nothing touched the injured feet. Then came the usual stages of bath-chair, crutches, sticks, and one stick. It was during the first half of this time that "Tillers of the Soil" was written; and if there is one thing whereof I feel a certain pride to-day, it is *The Times'* words on that book: "Mr. Patterson is quite incapable of pessimism. His high and good spirits, his fire and life and energy, infect every page."

Well, we mutually agreed, when this and so much

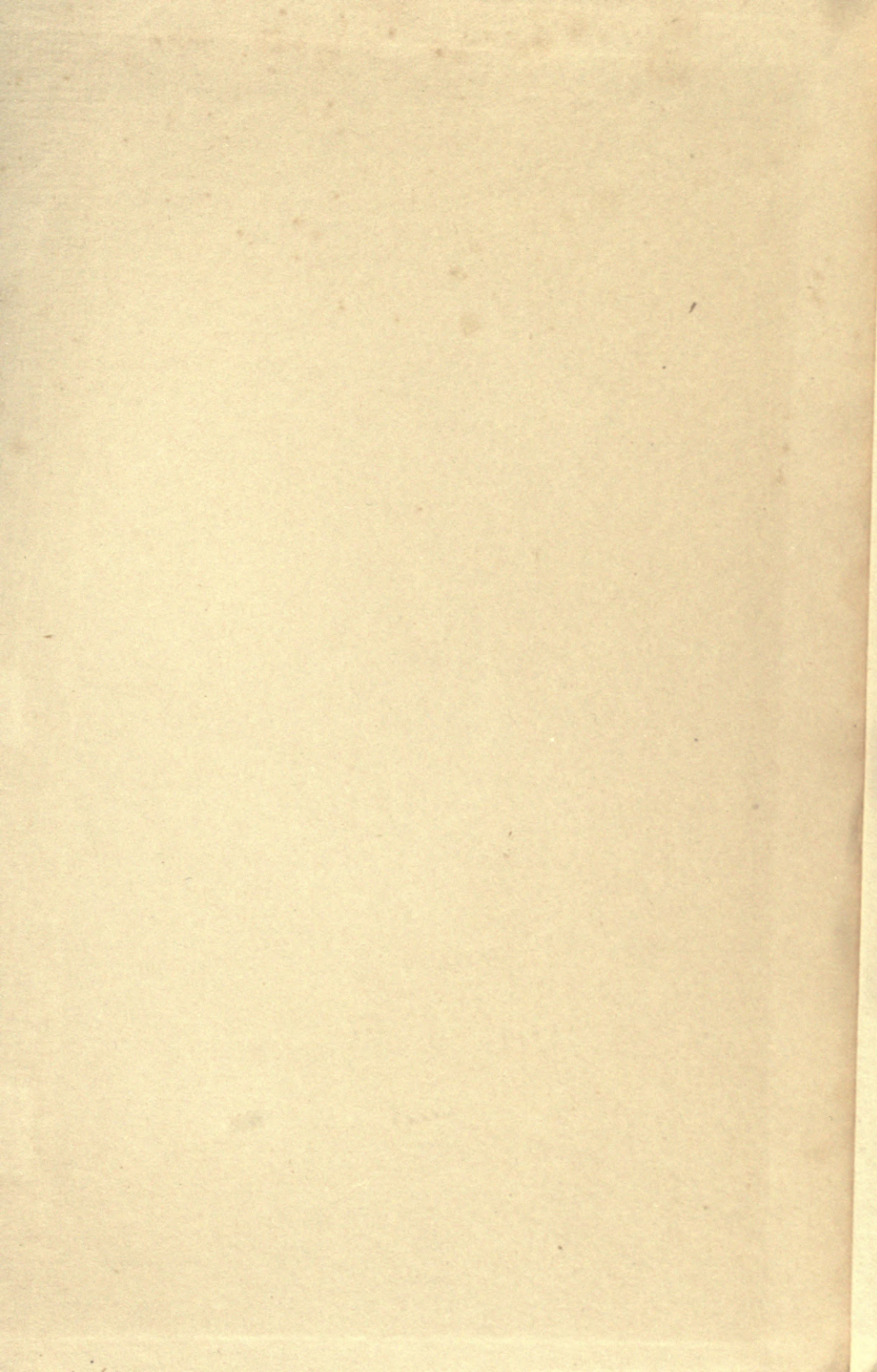
more printed kindness was read, that if all this can be won from the isolation of a country cottage, in such times of black outlook and without the help of log-rolling, then the greater end is possible after all—more, given a fair share of health, it will be attained. Yet I am only one of thousands who, every day of every year, somewhere or other the world around, wage the same fight against those contending circumstances which so largely help to make us what we are—ay, even up to the last if we but keep in the field of action. The only difference between them and me being that while they still fight in secret, I have opportunity and audience for a recital, to “shoulder my crutch and show how fields were won.” And here I ask the reader always to remember, as I do, that the man in the limelight on the stage is only *one* of the actors, and that there would be no play without the help of the others. Nor is it so much that we would as that we must continue the battle, which many of us would not quit in the hour of seeming defeat for a victory elsewhere. The reason is that we were born to it; have come along the way, gathering forces for the struggle that Nature put into us by the very mixture of those ingredients which she measured out for our separate formations mentally. Battle and the lust of conquest in some shape is a part of every healthy masculine temperament, inherent as the blood and breath by which we live. Fight somewhere, somehow we must, as man always must till he changes his very nature; and blessed be those who fight not against the good of their fellows. Wisdom is not a gift of youth, any more than humility is a growth of arrogant conquest; yet from time, the correcting of errors, that refining and strengthening which can only be had in the mills of adversity, and from the partial achievement of ideals much can be gathered in for general betterment. In the hour when the dark waters mass up to overwhelm, the sensitive soul

may cry aloud against the inhumanity of men and things; but when he has swum, half-drowned, out of the hurly-burly and recovered, he finds himself strengthened by the trial. This is not preaching, not meant to be, only a few bald facts as farewell words between one man and another. I see no reason for sentiment here; it fits not with my mood, as the narrative limps to its present close. You, reader, and I have travelled together as fellow-vagabonds over the fields, the seas and the up-and-down country of literature; sharing together a rough-and-tumble story, which I have striven to tell plainly, with truth that did not lay every ugly corner bare and with a self-revealing in which there should be no *parading* of the egoist. I have tried to entertain you with that simple humanness wherein only is there sincerity; and if the narrative has touched your heart at times, it has not been framed with the intention of doing so, but with the purpose of being sufficiently faithful to fact to give a wholeness to the story. If it has taught you that tenderness and a somewhat sad faith in the eventual good of things can grow and gain strength in a turbulent nature, then it has at least shown you one sweet truth in life. Now the journey is finished, let us part and go our separate ways as two whom chance has thrown together for a while on the turnpike of life. Here we are at the fork in the roads; let us whistle our dogs to our sides, say: *Au bon voyage*—and so farewell.

THE END

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